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BIBLE CHARACTERS

An account of the world in this one single view as God's world.

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BIBLE CHARACTERS

AHITHOPHEL TO NEHEMIAH

BY

ALEXANDER WHYTE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF 'BUNYAN CHARACTERS'

'LANCELOT ANDREWES' 'JACOB BEHMEN'

'SANTA TERESA' 'SIR THOMAS BROWNE'

'RUTHERFORD'S CORRESPONDENTS'

'FATHER JOHN' ETC.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
XLVIII. AHITHOPHEL	9
XLIX. MEPHIBOSHETH	21
L. BARZILLAI	33
LI. HEMAN	43
LII. JEROBOAM	54
LIII. THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET	64
LIV. REHOBAM	74
LV. JOSIAH	83
LVI. ELIJAH	93
LVII. ELISHA	101
LVIII. NAAMAN	109
LIX. JOB	118
LX. JONAH	127
LXI. ISAIAH	139

	PAGE
LXII. JEREMIAH	151
LXIII. DANIEL	163
LXIV. NEBUCHADNEZZAR	173
LXV. BELSHAZZAR	185
LXVI. ESTHER	194
LXVII. EZRA	208
LXVIII. SANBALLAT	220
LXIX. NEHEMIAH	231

BIBLE CHARACTERS

XLVIII

AHITHOPHEL



AM not going to whitewash and rehabilitate Ahithophel. I am neither to extenuate nor am I to denounce Ahithophel. I shall put myself back into Ahithophel's place, and I shall speak of Ahithophel as I see and feel Ahithophel to have been. I shall do my best to put myself first into Ahithophel's place, and then into David's place, and then I shall tell you exactly and honestly what I see and what I feel, first as to Ahithophel, and then as to David. But, to begin with, who was Ahithophel, and what were the facts?

Well, Ahithophel was far and away the ablest and the most famous politician, as we would say, in that day. The counsel of Ahithophel was a proverb in Israel in David's day. There was no one fit to hold the candle to Ahithophel in that day, unless it was Hushai the Archite, another of David's astutest counsellors. 'For the counsel of Ahithophel,' says the sacred writer, 'which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the

counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.'

Of those the false Ahithophel was first :
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace ;
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.

So Dryden describes Lord Chancellor Shaftesbury in his *Absalom and Ahithophel*, that very able but still more truculent and time-serving piece. Matthew Henry is always worth consulting. 'Ahithophel was a politic, thinking man, and one that had a clear head, and a great compass of thought,' and so on. If the traditional interpretation of the fifty-fifth and some other Ahithophel psalms is true and is to be taken, David and Ahithophel had been bosom friends from their boyhood up. Ahithophel may not have been exactly a Jonathan, and yet he may have been a very dear and well-deserving friend for all that. David and Ahithophel were such close companions, indeed, that had it not been for Jonathan, the proverb might have run thus—David and Ahithophel : so was the soul of David knit to the soul of Ahithophel. Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God, it is true ; but this out of David and about Ahithophel is almost as good. 'A man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto

the house of God in company.' Till, when David's time came to be lifted up of God into the throne of Israel, Ahithophel was proud to lay all his magnificent gifts of sound advice and incomparable counsel at David's feet. And Ahithophel continued to do that for all the best and most shining years of David's kingdom. David never made a law, nor gave a judgment, nor proclaimed a war, nor negotiated a truce, nor signed a peace, till Ahithophel had been heard, and till his advice had been taken. But the sacred writer has already given you all that, and far more than all that, in one of his incomparably strong and satisfying sentences; it was, he says, as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God.

All that Ahithophel was to David in the council-chamber, all that Eliam, Ahithophel's only son, was in the army. The father's splendid talents for counsel came out in the shape of soldierly service in the son; and the son was as devoted to David in the field as his father was in the chamber. Now, Eliam had a daughter at home, a beautiful woman-child, who was the one ewe-lamb of her father Eliam and her grandfather Ahithophel. And it so happened that Eliam had a very trusty under-officer among the captains of the mighty men, whose famous name was Uriah. This Uriah was not an Israelite—he was a Hittite; but he was as brave and as loyal to David as if he had been an Hebrew of the Hebrews. And his high talents and his great services had carried him to the very top of the six hundred, where he stood clothed

with worth and with honour beside Eliam the son of Ahithophel. With his whole soul Uriah loved Eliam's daughter, and both Eliam and Ahithophel gave to young Uriah the desire of his heart. David's devoted bodyguard had their quarters built for them in the city of David, and just under the walls of David's palace; and when Uriah came home on furlough, he was the happiest man in all Jerusalem with such a wife, and with Eliam and with Ahithophel. As time went on, and as Ahithophel counselled for David, and as Eliam and Uriah fought for David, David's power increased till the King of Israel denied himself nothing on which he had once set his heart. And in an evil hour he set his heart on Uriah's wife, who was also Ahithophel's one grandchild. And it does not need an oracle of God to tell us how Ahithophel took the ruin of his grandchild and the murder of her husband. Ahithophel would have been Jesus Christ Himself to have continued after all that to take sweet counsel with David, and to walk with David unto the house of God in company. I do not like to listen to all the names you would have called Ahithophel and Eliam had they still remained in David's service, and had they still eaten David's bread, with Bathsheba in David's bed and with her husband in his grave. I do not know what all you would have called Eliam and Ahithophel had they winked in that way at David's adultery and blood-guiltiness.

It was all that Ahithophel could do: he shook the dust off his feet, and Ahithophel returned

home out of the city of David to his own city of Giloh. And no sooner had Ahithophel left David than the Lord sent Nathan to David. And Nathan said to David, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul. And I gave thee thy master's house, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the edge of the sword, and hast taken his wife, Ahithophel's granddaughter, to be thy wife, and hast slain Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house. For thus saith the Lord, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun. And, after that, our hearts stand still as we watch how the vengeance of God came down on David's head, and how the vengeance of God travelled, as it always does, on stepping-stones which David laid for it with his own hands. As thus: And Amnon loved Absalom's sister. . . . But David did not trouble the spirit of Amnon, because he was his first-born. . . . And Absalom's servants did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. And Absalom fled and went to Geshur, and was there three years. . . . And David said, Let him return to Jerusalem, but let him not see my face. . . . And

Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. . . . And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh. And the conspiracy was strong, and the people increased continually with Absalom. For the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man inquired at the oracle of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel with Absalom as it had been wont to be with David.

Absalom had no head of his own. But he had what was better than ten heads of his own, for he had a head to know those who had heads and to send to their cities for them. And with Ahithophel's head like the oracle of God, and with his heart rankling against David like hell, the conspiracy was strong, and the people increased continually with Absalom. Ahithophel was worth ten thousand men to Absalom, and no one knew that better than David. And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. And then David took Hushai, his next astutest counsellor to Ahithophel, and filled him with guile and sent him back to deceive Absalom and to counteract all the counsels of Ahithophel. Which he did. For at the end of all their cross-counsels we read this report and this reflection of the sacred writer on it all: And Absalom said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that

He might bring evil upon Absalom. Ahithophel gave two of his deepest counsels to Absalom. Ahithophel has been called Judas, and all manner of evil names, for his first counsel that he gave to Absalom. And, no doubt, Ahithophel's first counsel sounds in our ears at this time of day abominable enough. But you will believe all things, and will hope all things even about Ahithophel. You will judge neither Ahithophel nor any other man, 'without necessity, nor without knowledge, nor without love.' For Absalom had said to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. And Ahithophel gave Absalom a counsel that you know already, or if you do not know it you will read it at home. Nothing, certainly, could sound worse. But, when I put myself in Ahithophel's place, for anything I know, the so subtle and so sorely injured Ahithophel may honestly enough have said something like this to himself. Something, possibly, like this: 'Has not David cast himself completely out of the throne? Has he not destroyed himself? Has he not thrown down the sceptre? Has not the Lord turned against him? And did not the Lord's righteous servant say that the Lord would do this same thing to David that David had done before all Israel and before the sun? I am only counselling Absalom to fulfil as the hand of the Lord what the Lord swore that He would do Himself to David.' Ahithophel's extraordinary and superhuman subtlety may honestly enough have led him to think that he saw in his counsel both prophecy, and policy, and pay-

ment back again into David's own bosom of all that David had done to other men, and to no man more than to Ahithophel himself. But whatever may be said about Ahithophel's first counsel, his second counsel to Absalom is pronounced to be good by the sacred writer; but, then, what of that, when the Lord had appointed to defeat it that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom? When we are working upon Ahithophel in this way, and when our minds and our hearts are full of Ahithophel, we cannot but wish that we had been told some more about him, and especially about his latter end. But the sacred writer has to hasten on. He has David and Absalom so much on his mind and on his heart that he draws a black border round Ahithophel's deathbed in these terrible words, and then leaves him: And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his own house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

Now, as you know, Ahithophel, from that day to this, has been stoned in his grave at Giloh, and all manner of names called at him as he lies there: Deserter, traitor, apostate, Judas Iscariot, suicide, and all manner of evil names, because he left David and joined Absalom. And, no doubt, had Ahithophel seen to the end, as he should have seen; had Ahithophel known all that we know,—and if he had been a better man he would have known more than even he was let know,—had he

known the half of what we know, Ahithophel would have held fast to David, let David do what he liked. But Ahithophel lived in the day of David and not yet in the day of Christ; and he suffered at the hand of David what neither you nor I have ever suffered at any man's hand. And if he did not live and die in David's service, and if you will never forgive him for that; then, if it will do you any good, you can go home casting stones all the way at Bathsheba's broken-hearted grandfather. My business to-night is neither to whitewash Ahithophel nor blacken David, even were that possible, but to let you see yourselves in them both as in a glass. How, then, have you always acted toward those of your former friends who have injured you and yours? Did you shut your door this morning and pray in secret, saying, Forgive me my trespasses against God and man, as I forgive him—naming him—who has so trespassed against me? When you stood here praying to-night, did you forgive some enemy? Ahithophel should have conquered himself. Ahithophel was not a Hittite. Ahithophel was well read in all the law of Moses, if not yet in the law of Christ. Ahithophel should have gone on with his work in the city of David. He should have said—what, indeed, had he got his great head and his deep heart for but to say it with them?—Vengeance is not mine. I have eaten David's bread when he had plenty, Ahithophel should have said, and he shall come to Giloh now and eat my bread. Yes, Ahithophel, like the oracle of God he was, should have called to mind this

psalm of David, and said : It shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head ; for yet my prayer shall be for David in all his calamities.

And, then, on the other hand, though it is not written out, I for one shall continue to believe it, that David in his best moments took it all home to himself that Ahithophel was gone over to Absalom. David knew quite well all the time whose grand-child Uriah's wife was. As soon as David came to himself he must have foreseen all this. David was not so quick in the uptake as Ahithophel, but he was not a fool,—when he came to himself. David knew as well as all Jerusalem did what it was that had thrown Ahithophel over to Absalom's side. We see it every day in our own parties in the state, in our parties in the church, in our parties in the city, in our parties in our families. We have the gall and wormwood in ourselves that it was we ourselves that did it. It was our bad temper, our bad tongue, our want of thought, our want of love, our want of patience, our want of humility that threw this old ally and that old adviser, this able man and that rich man, into the opposite camp. We all know men who have, to all appearance, gone over for ever from truth and goodness, and from the winning to the losing side, because of us. Every time we meet them on the street, every time we hear their name spoken, every time we call them in any way to mind, something says within us—You did it. We ministers especially have our own very heavy hearts on this account. Our neglect of duty, our laziness and procrastination at a moment that

went in a moment, and that we shall look back to with remorse all our days; our hot-headedness, our domineeringness, our indiscretions of speech, and our follies in conduct. Where is that family? Where is that former friend? Where is he who was once to us as the oracle of God? Where is that man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance? We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. Why is he no longer here? Why is he where he now is?

And, then, what did David think when Ahithophel's terrible end was told him? And what did Bathsheba think? Did she curse David to his face when it was told her what her grandfather had done to himself? Did Uriah's wife fling David's psalms in his face in her agony of horror and self-disgust? Did she scream in her sleep till all Jerusalem heard her as she saw in her sleep her grandfather's gallows at Giloh? Or was this prophecy fulfilled before it was spoken: In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, the house of David apart, and their wives apart, till there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness? And then did David go out to Giloh, and over the sepulchre of the suicide did David fall down and cry, past all consolation, O Ahithophel, the friend of my youth and my best counsellor, Ahithophel! Would God I had died for thee! O Ahithophel, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance! If he did—then this would come in, The sacrifices of God are a broken heart. What did David think. and what

did Bathsheba think? True. But what would you think if the first thing you saw to-morrow morning was the suicide of some one who has been the victim of your lust or your lies? Pray, man, pray. In God's name, pray. And though the poison may be bought, and the rope put up, God can do it. God can deliver you. With God all things are possible. Pray, you great sinner; pray, you great fool, pray. Pray, lest the newspaper run blood on your hands some morning, as the letters from Giloh ran Ahithophel's blood on David's hands. Pray for your Ahithophel without ceasing, and for all your Ahithophel's house. Give God no rest till He has remitted to you Ahithophel and all his injuries, and till He has repented of the evil He has reserved out of Ahithophel and out of his house against you. Every day you live, and till the day of your death, beseech the living God to make it all up to your Ahithophel and to set it all down to your account.

XLIX

MEPHIBOSHETH



MEPHIBOSHETH has been an enigma of motive and a study in self-interest from David's day down to our own day. Wherever the heart of man comes in you have always an enigma of motive and a study in self-interest. Wherever the heart of man plays a part you are soon out of your depth. There are many devices in a man's heart, and counsel in a man's heart is like deep water. The sacred writer sets us the enigma of Mephibosheth and his servant Ziba; but he gives us no hint at all as to how we are to decipher that enigma. He tells us Mephibosheth's story from the outside and on the surface, and so leaves us to make of the inside of it what we can. By that time both Mephibosheth and Ziba and David had long passed away; and already their motives and their mainsprings may well have become a sacred riddle in Israel. Given the story of Mephibosheth, and the story of Ziba, first at the flight of David and then at his victorious return, and then—was Mephibosheth a heartless, selfish, contemptible time-server, while Ziba, his servant, was a prince

beside him? Or, was Ziba a lying scoundrel, and Mephibosheth a poor, innocent, ill-used, lameter saint? Let us see the surface of the story.

Mephibosheth was the son and heir of Jonathan, David's oldest and best friend. Mephibosheth, the future king of Israel, was only five years old when Jonathan his father, and Saul his grandfather, both fell in the same battle on Mount Gilboa, and with their fall their family fell from the throne. In the terror that took possession of Jonathan's household that terrible day, Mephibosheth's nurse caught up the child and fled with him in her arms. But in her haste she let the little prince fall, and from that fall Mephibosheth was lame in his feet all his days. Years pass on. David sits in the throne of Saul and Jonathan and Mephibosheth, and his enemies are all subdued round about David. In his remembrance of God's great mercies, and in the magnanimity of his heart, David often called Saul and Jonathan to mind. And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the

son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. Then King David sent and fetched Mephibosheth out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. And David said unto him, Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan, thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the lands of Saul thy father, and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he did eat continually at the king's table, and was lame on both his feet.

Years passed on again, till Absalom by fair speeches and skilful courtesies had stolen the hearts of all Israel, of all of which Mephibosheth was a silent student, eating at David's table continually. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's old counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom, but Mephibosheth still ate at the king's table. And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are gone after Absalom. And David said unto his servants, and to them that sat at his table, Arise, let us flee. And the king went forth, and all his household after him. But Mephibosheth was lame on both his feet. And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met David with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said to Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba

said, 'The asses be for the king's household to ride on, and the bread and the summer fruits for the young men to eat, and the wine that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. And the king said, Where is thy master's son? And Ziba said to the king, Behold, he abideth in Jerusalem; for he said, To-day shall the house of Israel restore to me the kingdom of my father. Then the king said to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth. A few days after that the great battle was set in the wood of Ephraim, and of Absalom's side there was a great slaughter of twenty thousand men. And it was on that day that David went up to the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim, and wept; and as he went there he said, O my son Absalom; my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

So the king returned and came to Jordan. And Shimei, who had cursed and stoned David on the day of his flight from Jerusalem, hasted first and came down to meet King David. And Shimei fell down before the king and said, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For, behold, I am come the first this day to go down to meet my lord the king. And the king said to Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king swore unto him. And Mephibosheth also, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king. Our too otiose English is unjust

to Mephibosheth; or else it has taken Mephibosheth's infirmity in his feet much too seriously. Mephibosheth was not so crippled in his intellects, at any rate, as to stay in Jerusalem till the king came home. He was too eager for that to congratulate the king on his victory. We all know how the mind overmasters the body, and makes us forget all about its lameness, on occasions. And Mephibosheth was at the Jordan all the way from Jerusalem almost as soon as Shimei himself. Four hundred years before, just at the same place, when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they did work wilyly, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles old and rent and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them, and all the bread of their provisions was dry and mouldy. And Joshua said, Who are ye, and whence come ye? And they said, From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God. And Joshua made a league with them, to let them live; and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. And all that about Joshua and the Gibeonites came back to David's mind when he saw Mephibosheth lifted down from off his ass. For Mephibosheth had not dressed his wooden feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes for grief, so he said, from the day that the king departed. Nor had he taken time to-day to make himself decent for such a journey, such was his joy that the king was coming

back again to Jerusalem. Yes, but what came of thee that morning, Mephibosheth? asked David. I looked for thee. I was afraid that in the overthrow some evil had befallen thee. Thou art not able to bear arms for me; but thy father so strengthened my hands in God, that to have seen the face of his son that morning, and to have heard the voice of Jonathan's son would have done for me and for my cause what thy father did. My lord, said Mephibosheth—but 'the tale was as lame as the tale-bearer.' Ziba had stolen his ass just as he was mounting him to come with the king—and so on. David did not stoop to ask whose ass this was that Mephibosheth had got saddled so soon this morning. Say no more, Mephibosheth, said David, as he saw Jonathan's son crawling so abjectly before him. Dr. Kitto complains of David's tart answer to Mephibosheth. But if David was too tart, then with what extraordinary and saintly sweetness Mephibosheth received the over-tartness of the king. 'Let Ziba take all my estates to-day, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house.' No, there was nothing cripple in Mephibosheth's intellects. 'Mephibosheth was a philosopher,' says Dr. Parker. 'I find no defect of his wits in Mephibosheth,' says honest Joseph Hall. And the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

Now, the first thing that goes to our hearts out of this miserable story is this, that Mephibosheth

was the son of Jonathan. But Solomon, as he moralises in one place on fathers and sons with Jonathan and Mephibosheth before him, tells us to rejoice with trembling when our sons are born to us, for who knoweth whether they shall be wise men or fools?

Rarely into the branches of the tree
Doth human worth mount up : and so ordains
He who bestows it, that as His free gift
It may be called.

The poor child's accident while he was yet a child may well have been at the bottom of it all. Diminutive and dwarfed persons, deformed persons, and greatly crippled persons are sometimes so thrown in upon themselves as to make them melancholy, morbid, and misanthropic. If their hearts are bad, their bodily disabilities will sometimes work in their hearts to a deep and a malignant wickedness. Both true history and truthful fiction have taken firm hold of this frequent fact in human life. I do not know that the other side has been so often brought out—that great bodily infirmity and disability, alongside of a renewed and a humble heart, will sometimes result in a sweetness and a saintliness of a most uncommon kind. In poor Mephibosheth's case, it would seem as if his early and life-long infirmity, taken along with the hopeless loss of his brilliant prospects, had all eaten into his heart till he became the false, selfish, scheming creature that David found him out to be.

Hephæstion loved Alexander, while Craterus

loved the king. And Jonathan was like Hephæstion in this, that he loved David at all times, whereas his son Mephibosheth resembled Craterus in this, that he preferred David on the throne to David off the throne. Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God in the wood of Ziph; but Mephibosheth, like another classical character, fled the empty cask. How Mephibosheth's heart had overflowed with gratitude to David when the royal command came that he was to leave Machir's house in Lo-debar, and was henceforth to take up his quarters in the king's house in Jerusalem! All Mephibosheth's morosity and misanthropy melted off his heart that day. But such was Mephibosheth at the bottom of his heart that, as he continued to eat at David's table, Satan entered into Mephibosheth and said to him in his heart that all this was his own by original and divine right. All this wealth, and power, and honour, and glory. But for the bad fortune of his father's royal house on Mount Gilboa, all this would to-day have been his own. 'Ingratitude,' says Mozley, 'is not only a species of injustice, it is the highest species of injustice.' And the ingratitude of Mephibosheth grew at David's table to this high injustice, that he waited for both David and Absalom to be chased out of Jerusalem, that he might take their place. 'There is no baser heart than an ungrateful heart. And it was Mephibosheth's ungrateful heart that prepared him for the baseness that he was found out in both at the flight of David and at his victorious return.

The virtues were invited once
To banquet with the Lord of All :
They came,—the great ones rather grim,
And not so pleasant as the small.

They talked and chatted o'er the meal,
They even laughed with temp'rate glee ;
And each one knew the other well,
And all were good as good could be.

Benevolence and Gratitude
Alone of all seemed strangers yet ;
They stared when they were introduced,—
On earth they never once had met.

Dean Milman says that the writings both of Tacitus and Dante are full of remorse. And it is, as I believe, in our own remorse that we shall find the true key to Mephibosheth's heart and character. When a government goes out of power, when a church is under a cloud, when religion has lost her silver slippers, and when she walks in the shadow of the street, and when any friend of ours has lost his silver slippers—then we discover Mephibosheth in ourselves, and hate both him and ourselves like hell. And commentators have taken sides over the case of Mephibosheth very much as they have found that contemptible creature skulking in themselves, and have had bitter remorse on account of him. 'I am full of self-love, fear to confess Thee, or to hazard myself, or my estate, or my peace. . . . My perplexity continues as to whether I shall move now or not, stay or return, hold by Lauderdale, or make use of the Bishop. I went to Sir George Mushet's funeral, where I was

looked at, as I thought, like a speckled bird. . . . I find great averseness in myself to suffering. I am afraid to lose life or estate. Shall I forbear to hear that honest minister, James Urquhart, for a time, seeing the stone is like to fall on me if I do so?' And then our modern Mephibosheth has the grace to add in his diary, 'A grain of sound faith would easily answer all these questions. I have before me Mr. Rutherford's letter desiring me to deny myself.' And though you will not easily believe it, the author of that letter himself has enough of Jonathan's crippled and disinherited son still in himself to give a tang of remorse to some of his very best letters. 'Oh,' agonises Samuel Rutherford, 'if I were only free of myself! Myself is another devil, and as evil as the prince of devils. Myself! Myself! Every man blames the devil for his sins, but the house and heart devil of every man is himself. I think I shall die still but minting and aiming to be a Christian man!'

This, then, is the prize for finding out that enigma of motive, Mephibosheth's hidden heart. This is the first prize, to receive of God the inward eye to discover Mephibosheth ever deeper down in ourselves. And the eye never to let Mephibosheth for a moment out of our sight as he sits at David's table feeding his ingratitude, and his duplicity, and his calculation of his chances. To see him also as he waits on providence in Jerusalem to hear how the battle is to go. And then to see him in his hurry to get to Jordan, where he arrives by a sport of providence just at the same moment

with Shimei. If all that is the riddle of the sacred writer, and if all that is the right answer, then the reward of our skill is that we shall be made both able and willing to see Mephibosheth in everything in ourselves. For are we not told that all these Old Testament men are there as our examples? And that the wheel of providence is still turning in our day as it turned in their day? One man goes up on that wheel of God and another man goes down. One cause prospers and another cause decays. And in the manifold wisdom of God it is all ordered and overruled, as if both the wheel, and He whose wheel it is, and all the men, and movements, and governments, and churches, and everything else that is tied to that wheel were all tied to it and lifted, now up and now down, in order to discover us to ourselves, and to send us to His feet, who will not cast away even Mephibosheth himself if he comes to His feet in time. Our own good name and fame also, all our possessions, and all our expectations are all tied on to that wheel, for our hearts to be discovered and denounced, and for deliverance to be wrought in us from the dominion of such a heart. Every day, by the sovereign and electing grace of God, we are surely making some way in this knowledge of the wickedness past finding out of our own hearts, and some progress in the clearing out and conquest of that wickedness. Every day we are surely putting ourselves more and more in the place of our neighbour, and are doing more and more to him as we would he did to us. Till at last—O blessed hope!—every tang and

taint of Mephibosheth's heart shall be taken out of us, and till truth, and righteousness, and fidelity, and gratitude, and courage, and love shall for ever reign in us and around us and over us. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus !

L

BARZILLAI

BARZILLAI, to put it all into one word, was an aged, venerable, hospitable Highland chief. Barzillai, by this time, was eighty years of age, and he was as full of truth, and courage, and goodwill, and generosity as he was full of years. From within the walls of his lofty keep in far-off Gilead, Barzillai had watched the ways of God with His people Israel in the south country all through the days of Eli, and Samuel, and Saul, and David, and Joab, and Jonathan, and Mephibosheth, and Absalom, and his humble heart and his hospitable house had always been open to the oppressed, and to the persecuted, and to the poor. And thus it was that when David fled from Jerusalem to escape from Absalom, and when David made his final stand at Mahanaim, Barzillai lost no time in coming down to David's assistance. The sacred writer is at particular pains to tell us the whole of that truly Highland hospitality with which Barzillai replenished the king's camp at Mahanaim. Beds, we read, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour,

and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine for David, and for his people that were with him. For Barzillai said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness. Then come the two chapters about the successful battle; after which, when David sets out to return to Jerusalem, the sacred writer takes up the noble name of Barzillai again in this fine passage: 'And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. And the king said to Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old, and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden to my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over the Jordan with the king; and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother. And when the king was come over the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him; and Barzillai returned to his own place.' A beautiful old man, and a beautiful incident in a far from beautiful time.

Now, to begin with, Barzillai was a true Highlander in his splendid loyalty to David in his distress. Many men who had sat at David's royal table, and who had held their lands at David's royal liberality ; many such men hedged and held back till they should see whether David's sun was to set, never to rise again, or not. Where is thy master ? said David to Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth. But Barzillai was not Mephibosheth. There was no lameness in Barzillai's allegiance to David. Barzillai did not wait to see how the wind would blow. The old hero took his ancient tower, and his great estate, and his own future, and the future of his family all in his hand that day. And, had Absalom succeeded, Barzillai would have been an outlawed and a sequestered man ; and all the omens, to those who went by omens, looked that way that day. But Barzillai had steered all his eighty years by the fixed stars of truth, and righteousness, and duty, and loyalty, and he would steer by the same sure stars to the end. Even had David's cause been as bad as it was good, Barzillai's loyalty would have been noble to contemplate. Wrong-headed and short-sighted as was our own Highland loyalty to the Stuart House, there was not a little that was noble and brave and beautiful in it. It was a mad project to think to solder the crown of Charles Stuart to the crown of Jesus Christ ; at the same time, there was a pathos and a poetry in it that still touch our hearts to this day. But Barzillai's loyalty to David was as sane-headed as it was warm-hearted. It

was as far-seeing and as sure-footed as it was warm-hearted and open-handed. David, on the throne or off the throne; David, in Jerusalem or in Mahanaim, is our divine king, said Barzillai to his household. The God of battles will do as seemeth Him good in this business, but our duty is clear, and it is pressing. Make haste and make up a present for David, and let it be the best. And say to the king that Barzillai, his servant, follows after the present as fast as his fourscore years will let him. Had Barzillai been tempted to hedge at dangers, and to calculate chances, and to weigh likelihoods, and to find excuses, he would not have wanted materials. No doubt David had done not a little to bring this terrible overthrow upon himself. And a cautious man would have considered all that. There are always sufficient reasons why a deliberating and a considering man should stand aloof for a time from a fallen man. But Barzillai had no head for such reserves and calculations. David was David to Barzillai, and as long as Barzillai has a roof over his head and a morsel of meat on his table, David shall not want. David's adversity was only all the more Barzillai's duty and opportunity.

And, every day, we all have Barzillai's duty and opportunity too, if only we have Barzillai's mind and heart. Not that kings and princes lie in want in our neighbourhood every day; but good causes do, and needy and deserving men, and old and distressed friends. There is not a day passes but our boldness, and our courage, and our loyalty, and our

fidelity are put to the test. There is not a day that we do not hear some censuring, fault-finding, detracting, and injuring word spoken against an absent friend. And what do we do? Do we let it pass? Do we in our heart of hearts like to hear it? Do we silently, or with a half-uttered consent fall in with it? How seldom do we stand up as we would be stood up for! How seldom do we pluck out the false and spiteful tongue! Let us be men the next time. Let us be Barzillai the next time, if Absalom, and Ahithophel, and Mephibosheth, and all the miserable house of Israel are all arrayed against David. Let them know from Jerusalem to Mahanaim that there is one man in Israel who is a man and is not a dog.

Barzillai's truly Highland courtesy, also, is abundantly conspicuous in the too-short glimpse we get of the lord of Rogelim. For, how he anticipated all David's possible wants! How he put himself into all David's distressed place! How he did to David as David would have done to him! How he came down from his high seat, with all his years on his head, in order with his own hand to conduct the king over Jordan! And, then, with what sweetness of manner and music of speech he excused himself out of all the royal rewards and honours and promotions David had designed and decreed to put upon him!

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing, pays itself. Your Highness' part
Is to receive our duties; and our duties
Are to your throne and state children and servants,

Which do but what they should, by doing everything
Safe towards your love and honour.

The rest is labour which is not used for you.

The humility, also, of that Old Testament hero is already our New Testament humility in its depth and sweetness and beauty. A perfect and a finished courtesy has always its roots struck deep down into humility; which humility, again, has its roots struck deep down into the grace of God. In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Yea, all of you be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humility and courtesy are the court manners of the kingdom of heaven. A true, a finished, and an unconscious courtesy is the perfected etiquette of the palace and the presence of the great King.

And, then, there can be no doubt about Barzillai's Highland hospitality. Highland hospitality is a proverb of honour among us; and Barzillai's hospitality was the same proverb in the whole after history of Israel. As hospitable as Barzillai of Rogelim, they used to say. A bishop must be like Barzillai of Rogelim, wrote Paul to both Timothy and Titus. One would think that the two asses that stood so laden and waiting for David on the top of the hill had marched straight out of Barzillai's butler's pantry. As, indeed, so they had. For Ziba, who had saddled and so loaded them, had first learned how to saddle

and how to load an ass when he lived at Lodebar. He had found out how much charity a strong ass could carry when he and his master lived on charity at Rogelim and Lodebar. A couple of asses saddled as they used to saddle them at Rogelim and Lodebar could carry two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits and a bottle of wine. But it is not great lords only like Barzillai of Rogelim and Machir of Lodebar and Shobi of Rabbah who are summoned to show hospitality. No class of men could be poorer than were the bishops of Paul's day, and yet the apostle enjoins Titus and Timothy to ordain no man who is not given to hospitality. And the same apostle reminds the poor Hebrew laity that some men in old times have entertained angels unawares. But the truth is, true Highland hospitality is in the mind and in the heart of the host and hostess. A poor widow's hut will show you Highland hospitality in the way she comes out and offers you a drink of milk or even of water. You cannot tie up the hands of a hospitable heart. Does not Aristotle himself tell us that a munificently-minded man is seen as well in his present of a ball or a top or a picture to a little child as in a temple or a sacrifice or a banquet to a God? And has not a Greater than Aristotle told us that the widow's mite will be extolled for its splendid munificence wherever His munificent gospel is preached? Hospitality and munificence and magnanimity are in the mind and in the heart, and it is the mind and the heart that

are accepted and acknowledged of God. 'With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you'; so our Lord lays down His last-day law. And then Bengel annotates our Lord's law thus: *Mensura est cor*. The measure is the heart, with its capabilities, desires, anxiety to impart blessings to others, and loving obedience. And thus it is that hospitality, with its present blessedness and its everlasting rewards, is not a matter of wealth or poverty, any more than it is of race or region.

Barzillai's passionate love of his Highland hills and valleys is another fine feature in this ripe old saint. As also his brooding, emotional, melting, Gaelic-like eloquence when he opens his whole heavenly-minded heart to David. Like Moses also in his old age, Barzillai has numbered his days, and has applied his heart to wisdom. Like Paul also, if his outward man must perish, then Barzillai will see to it that his inward man shall not be squandered abroad and lost. No! 'Let the king pardon and discharge his servant,' Barzillai said. 'The king, I fear, forgets how old I am. This is my birthday, and I am fourscore years old to-day. No; it is not for an old man like me to go up to Jerusalem. My time is past to be eating and drinking as they will eat and drink in Jerusalem when God sends back their king to his people. I would be a burden to myself and to the king's servants. But take my son, if it please thee, and let him see Jerusalem. But as for me, the king will let me return home to die and to be buried

beside my father and my mother. I shall need all my time; for I am fourscore years old this day, and how shall I go up with the king to Jerusalem?' Who can help loving the octogenarian Barzillai, with his 'courtesy in conversation,' and when, like Pompey in Plutarch, he 'gave without disdain, and took with great honour'? And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and Barzillai returned to his place at Rogelim.

And in this also the wise and good Barzillai is surely a beautiful lesson to all old men. Barzillai shows us how to take our advancing years. He shows us how to apply our hearts to wisdom as we number our days. He shows us also how, with all willingness, and sweetness, and courtesy, and divine wisdom to leave cities, and feasts, and crowds, and trumpets, and honours, and promotions to younger men, and to apply our whole remaining strength, and our whole remaining time, to end our days as our days should be ended. Barzillai having showed us how to live, shows us also how to die. Barzillai dies the same devout and noble and magnanimous man he has all his days lived. We have not as yet learned to live; and how, then, can we know how to die? We die like a man run down in a race. We die like a man who has not lived half his days. We die while yet this word is in our mouth, To-day or to-morrow I will go to such a city, and will buy and sell, and get gain. We die like a fox taken in a trap. We die like a rat poisoned in a hole. But Barzillai died like the heavenly-minded man he had always lived. Barzillai died like our own Highland

laird, Fraser of Brea. For Fraser of Brea died still 'laying his pipe' ever closer and closer up and up to the fountain, till the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne led him to the living Fountain itself, and till God wiped all tears from his eyes.

LI

HEMAN

HEMAN was 'David's seer in the matters of God.' Now a seer is just a man who sees. He is just a man who has eyes in his head. Other men also have eyes indeed, but, then, they do not see with their eyes as a seer sees. A seer stands out among all other men in this, that he sees with all his eyes. Heman, then, was a seer. And he was a seer in this. Heman saw constantly a sight that to most men even in Israel was absolutely invisible. Heman saw, and saw nothing else, but his own soul. From his youth up Heman had as good as seen nothing in the whole world but his own soul. And, after he was well on in life, Heman was moved of God to set down the sight of his own soul in the eighty-eighth Psalm. David, on occasion, was a wonderful seer himself. But David had not given himself up from his youth up to the things of his own soul as Heman had done. David was a man of affairs, and he had many other matters to see to besides the matters of God and of his own soul; but Heman saw nothing

else. Separate me Heman and Heman's soul, the Holy Ghost had said. And it was so. And David, discovering that, made Heman the king's seer. Saul also in his day had sought out a seer. Only, the seer that Saul sought out was a seer who could see stolen sheep on the mountains a hundred miles away. Whereas David sought in Heman a seer who could see both David's soul and his own; and who could see sin in David's soul and in his own when no other eye in all Israel could see it. My sin is ever before me, said David, when his eyes were once opened. And it was to Heman, under God, even more than to Nathan or Gad, that David owed that ever-present sight. 'In the matters of God Heman was the King's seer,' says the sacred writer. God had many matters, first and last, with David; but God's first matter with David, as with all men, was David's sin and David's soul. And Heman from his youth up had been kept so close at God's school for seers in the matters of sin and the soul, that David sought out Heman and established him in Mount Zion as the King's most private, most trusted, and most highly-honoured seer. This, then, was Heman, the seer of David in the matters of God.

'My soul is full of troubles,' says this great seer, speaking about himself in the eighty-eighth Psalm. What led Heman to speak about himself in that way to a people who could not understand what he said, we do not know. What led Heman to speak and to publish abroad this most melancholy of all the Psalms we are not told. He speaks in this

Psalm as he was moved to speak by the Holy Ghost: but more than that we do not know. It may have been to console David in some of his many inconsolable seasons. It may have been to rebuke David by letting him see that a saint of God who had never sinned as David had sinned, had, nevertheless, been cast of God into depths that even David had never known. Or it may have been that there might be a Psalm grievous enough for our Lord to recall it and to repeat it during His three hours darkness on the cross. Or it may have been because God, in His far foreknowledge, saw some one in this house this night that no other Psalm would suit but this saddest of all the Psalms. Who can tell? Now, Heman's soul so full of troubles, you must understand, was not on account of Heman's outward estate. It was not Heman's actual sin like David's. Neither was there any terrible trouble, like David's, among his large family of sons and daughters. Heman had brought up his sons and daughters far more successfully than David had done. For all Heman's sons and daughters assisted their father in sacred song in the house of the Lord. Some of the worst troubles we see and hear men's souls to be full of all around us come to them through their children. But that was not Heman's case. At the same time Heman cannot take a happy father's full joy out of his talented and dutiful children because of the overwhelming trouble of his own soul. He cannot sing and play with his gifted and gracious children with all his heart as other happy fathers sing and play. And

that is another trouble to Heman's soul already so full of troubles. It is a terrible price to pay for his post as David's seer to have a soul like that. It is a terrible baptism into the matters of God to have a soul from his youth up so full of inconsolable troubles.

'My soul is full of troubles,' says Heman, 'till I am driven distracted.' Every day we hear of men and women being driven distracted through love, and through fear, and through poverty, and through pain, and sometimes through over-joy, and sometimes, it is said, through religion. It was thought by some that the Apostle Paul was quite distracted in his day through his too much thought and occupation about divine things. And our Lord Himself was again and again said to be beside Himself. And no wonder. For if love, and fear, and pain of mind and heart, and sometimes over-joy have ever driven men distracted: who ever had all these things, and more, on his mind and on his heart like our Lord? To see what was in man, and what comes out of the heart of man: and to see all that with such holy eyes and with such a holy heart as His, and then to see and understand how all that so concerned Himself—had the very Godhead not held Him up, no mortal mind and heart could have endured under the sight. No wonder that Jesus of Nazareth was often, even to His mother and His brethren, like a man that should be kept close watch over at home. The Second Evangelist was a remarkable seer in all the matters of our Lord. He saw things in our Lord that no other Evangelist

had the eyes to see: and he writes about our Lord in words that no other Evangelist can command. And one word he writes in goes so near describing absolute distraction that we shrink back from truly and fully translating it. We water it down till we say that our Lord was sore amazed and very heavy. To be made sin sore amazed our Lord. It almost drove Him beside Himself. A terror at sin, and a horror: a terror and a horror at Himself, took possession of our Lord's soul in the garden till He was full of a trouble beyond all experience and imagination of mortal men. It was not death. Death is nothing. Death is nothing to sin. Death and all its terrors did not much move our Lord. He went up to meet death with a serenity and with a stateliness of soul that confounded and almost converted those who saw it. No; it was not death. It was sin. It was that in which our mothers conceived us. It was that which we drink up like water. It was that which we are all full of from the sole of the foot even unto the head. It was sin. It was hell-fire in His soul. It was the coals, and the rosin, and the juniper, and the turpentine of the fire that is not quenched. The pains of hell gat hold upon Him, He found trouble and sorrow till He was well-nigh distracted. Now there was no Old Testament saint so like our Lord in all that as was Heman. And in the measure that we have our Lord's eyes and Heman's eyes wherewith to see sin, in that exact measure will we each one of us fill up what is behind of these tremendous distractions. As it is, our brain sometimes reels in its

distracted globe. We know that we sometimes talk distractedly. We know that we terrify and torment other men. We terrify and are a torment to ourselves when no one knows it. We tremble sometimes at the thought of what this may yet grow to if it goes on, as it will go on, all our days. But be not too much cast down. Comfort my people. Say to them that for all their present shame they shall yet have double. Say to them that this is wisdom. Say to them that this is the only mind that hath the true wisdom. Say to them, and assure them, that this is the beginning in them of the wisdom, and the truth, and the love, and the salvation of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now, with all that, this is not to be wondered at that Heman says next. Anything else but this is not to be expected from Heman. Heman makes it an additional complaint, but it is a simple and a necessary consequence of his own troubled and distracted soul. 'Thou hast put mine acquaintance far from me. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.' Job, Heman's spiritual equal almost, has the very same complaint again and again. 'He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed me, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. All my inward friends have abhorred me; and they whom I loved are all turned against me.' And no wonder. Who that could help it would live in the same house with Heman? With such a

morose and melancholy man? Friends and lovers, the oldest, and the warmest, and the best—they all have their several limits. Most men are made with little heart themselves, and they are not at home where there is much heart, and much exercise of heart. They flee in a fright from the heights and the depths of the high and deep heart. It needs a friend that sticketh closer than a brother to keep true to a man who has much heart, and who sees and feels with all his heart. Heman had wife and child: he had David, and Asaph, and Jeduthun also; and a whole choir-seat full of smiling acquaintances; but all that only made him feel the more alone. Asaph, also, in the same seat, felt the same loneliness. ‘Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.’ Much as Heman and Asaph had in common, they were all the time such strangers to one another when their distractions were upon them that they felt, as we say, as far as the poles asunder. When thou prayest, said our Lord, enter thy closet. That is to say, enter thine own distracted heart. And there is One, and only One, with thee in thy lockfast heart. David and Asaph and all,—there is nothing that sifts out lover and friend like prayer; the prayer that is, that takes up the troubles and the distractions of the soul. When our Lord took His distracted soul to His Father, the most that His best lovers and friends could do for Him was to fall asleep three times outside the door. Heman, besides being the king’s seer, was also an eminent type of Christ, both in the distracting troubles of

his soul, and in the fewness and in the infidelity of his friends.

Down to Gehenna, and up to the Throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.

Now all that, bad as it was, would have been easily borne had it been a sudden stroke and then for ever over. Had it been a great temptation, a great fall, a great repentance, a great forgiveness, and then the light of God's countenance brighter than ever all Heman's after-days. Had it been with Heman as it was with David: 'For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' Or had it been with Heman as it was with Isaiah: 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.' Josiah and Jeremiah bore their yoke also all their youth; but Heman bore his yoke all his days. Heman is now an old man; but like the woman in the gospel he is nothing better but rather worse. There are troubles and distractions in a man's youth sometimes that turn his hair grey before its proper time. But in most cases, by God's goodness, a life like that either comes to an early end altogether, or some great relief and great recovery comes in His grace from God. For the Lord will not cast off for ever. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But Heman's yoke

from his youth up has been of that terrible kind that it has eaten into his soul deeper and deeper with every advancing year. Had Heman lived after Paul's day he would have described himself in Paul's way. He would have said that the two-edged sword had become every year more and more spiritual, till it entered more and more deep every year into his soul. And since souls like Heman's are absolutely bottomless and shoreless; and since the law of God is infinitely and increasingly holy and just and good; how could a man like Heman escape being every day of his life more and more sold under sin? He could not. All that Heman had hitherto come through was like child's-play at trouble and distraction compared with this. For his troubles have now taken on an inwardness and an incessancy such as an old saint of God once said would surely some day drive her into the pond.

God forbid, when God is a little displeased with any of His saints, that I should by a single hair-breadth help forward their affliction. God forbid that I should in anything make the heart of any righteous man more sad and should take away from him any of his true refuges. Before I do that may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. At the same time, I will risk it lest they be refuges of lies. I will risk it so that some one here present may perchance be discovered to himself and so saved. Heman's sad case has sometimes been set down to God's sovereignty. And so may all your sadness, possibly. But I would not have you believe that too easily. The chances with you

lie all the other way. Are you quite sure that this deep darkness of yours is quite unaccountable to you short of God's sovereignty—short of His deep, hidden, divine will? I doubt it, and I would have you doubt it. I would have you make sure that there is no other possible explanation of this darkness of His face. All the chances are that it is not God's ways that are so distractingly dark, but your own. Look yet closer and yet deeper into yourself for the bottom of this dark mystery. If I were you I would let no man, not even an angel of light, cheat me out of my soul with any of his antinomianisms about the divine sovereignty. Is it not rather a divine controversy? Lean to that explanation. Look as you have never yet looked, and see if there is not some sinful way in you that is the cause of all this darkness on God's part, and all this distraction on your part. The only thing you can think of is such a little thing, that, if it is a sin, it is not worth God's pains to take so much notice of it, and to punish you so persistently for it. It is not a thing for God to stand upon; it is such a small affair. Well, if it is so small, all the more put it away. Put it away for a time at any rate, and, if light does not come, then return to it, if you cannot live without it. Only, there is a sermon of authority which says, Be ye therefore perfect; and it is through terrible distractions, and darknesses, and severities, and sanctifications that this perfect salvation comes to some men: and it looks to me as if you were one of them.

And to close with, there is a singular use in Heman for ministers. When God is to make a very sinful man into a very able, and skilful, and experimental minister, He sends that man to the same school to which He sent Heman. This was God's way, on the side of His sovereignty, with the Servant of the Lord also in the 50th of Isaiah. 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulations,' says Paul also, 'that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.' His own troubles and distractions give a minister 'a lady's hand,' as an old writer has it, in dealing with troubled and distracted souls. Now, who can tell what God has laid up for you to do for Him and for men's souls when you are out of your probationership of trouble and distraction, and are promoted to be a comforter of God's troubled and distracted saints? He may have a second David, and far more, to comfort and to sanctify in the generation to come; and you may be ordained to be the King's seer in the matters of God. Who can tell? Only, be you ready, for the stone that is fit for the wall is not left to lie in the ditch.

LII

JEROBOAM



OD may have that in his heart for you, which you must not once let enter your heart for yourself. Your name may be written in the divine decree for something, the bare thought of which you must cast out of your heart like poison. And all Jeroboam's great talents, and all his great services, and all his great prospects, and all his great temptations, and all his great sins—all happened to him for ensamples; and they are all written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

But we must go back to the first beginning of Jeroboam's great temptations and great transgressions. It was King Solomon's many and terrible falls from godliness and from virtue that first set such a fatal snare before Jeroboam's feet. Solomon by this time was rushing insensate to his own ruin, and to the ruin of his royal house. If it were not written all over the Bible we would not believe it. Solomon's beautiful dream at Gibeon, his splendid prayer at the dedication of the temple, his wisdom, and his understanding, and his largeness of heart—

it is all clean forgotten now. It is all become now like the morning cloud and the early dew. Can this be the same Solomon? Can this be that Solomon to whom the Lord appeared twice? For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Molech, the abomination of the Ammonites. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill of God that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of Ammon. In his old age, and when he should have been by this time a rare and a ripe saint of God, Solomon added this also to his other transgressions, an insane passion for building palaces both for himself and for his heathen queens, and temples and altars for their cruel and unclean gods, and great fortifications, and all manner of proud and costly and reckless public works. And, with it all, there was this also: Every stone of all Solomon's temples and palaces and heathen altars was laid wet with the blood of an oppressed and exasperated people. The prophet Samuel had foretold all this to the elders of Israel, and had got little thanks from them for so foretelling it. But every jot and tittle of God's great prophet had by this time been long proved true; and every warning word of his was now like a fire in the bones of Solomon's miserable subjects. As they bled to death under the whip of the tax-gatherer and the task-master, the people gnashed their teeth at their fathers and at themselves. For had not Samuel told it thus to their face? 'He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for

his chariots, and for his horsemen ; and he will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and will give them to his servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and will put them to his work, and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.' Well, that day was now fully come. And it was amid all the terrible oppression and suffering of that day that Jeroboam rose so fast and so high in Solomon's service. Jeroboam's outstanding talents in public affairs, his skilful management of men, his great industry, and his great loyalty, as was thought, all combined to bring the son of Nebat under Solomon's royal eye, till there was no trust too important, and no promotion too high for young Jeroboam. And then, to crown it all, as time went on Satan more and more entered into Jeroboam's heart. And Jeroboam allowed Satan in his heart, and listened to Satan speaking in his heart. 'You are a greatly talented man. There is no other man in all the land fit to be your equal. Solomon is old, and his son is a fool. And who is to be king after Solomon dies? Thinkest thou ever who is fit to be king? Saul was but the son of Kish. David himself was but the son of Jesse. There has never been, and there never will be, respect of persons with the God of Israel. Jeroboam, you love your widowed mother. Play

the man, then, but a little longer, and your mother will live to hear the cry of the people before she dies, this so sweet cry to her ears, Long live King Jeroboam !' And Jeroboam kept all these things and pondered them in his heart.

All this time, Ahijah the prophet, with those terrible eyes of his, was sleeplessly watching both the fast-coming fall of Solomon, as well as the immense industry and steady rise of Jeroboam. Ahijah's eyes, like a flame of fire, saw, naked and open, all that was hidden so deep in Jeroboam's heart; and he heard, as with God's own ears, all that Satan said to Jeroboam in his heart. Ahijah watched Jeroboam at his work, and he saw, till he could not be silent, that Jeroboam was fast undermining the walls of Jerusalem in his heart, all the time that he was receiving praise and promotion for building those walls up with his hands. 'Lay down thy plummet,' said Ahijah in hot anger to Jeroboam one day—'lay down thy measuring line, and come out to the potter's field with me.' And Jeroboam laid down his building and came out after Ahijah. Then Ahijah suddenly turned and stripped off his new garment that was upon Jeroboam, and tore it up into twelve pieces, and said, 'Thus and thus hast thou torn up the kingdom of Solomon in thine heart. And it shall be so. Take thee ten of these torn-up pieces and hide them with thee till all that is in thine heart shall come true.' And then the prophet, softening somewhat, went on to tell the trembling builder that if he would but cast Satan and all his counsels

and all his hopes out of his heart from that day, then the God of Israel would make him a sure house, so that he and his seed should sit on the throne of Israel for ever. And Ahijah thrust the ten torn pieces upon Jeroboam and departed. And Jeroboam returned to his work on the wall of Jerusalem with his heart all in a flame. And it came to pass that when Solomon heard of all that, Solomon turned to be against Jeroboam. And Solomon eyed Jeroboam as Saul had eyed David, and as we all eye those gifted men who are fast rising to push us out of our seat. And just as David fled to Ramah from the javelin of Saul, so Jeroboam fled to Egypt from the same weapon of Solomon. And not Joseph, and not Moses himself, rose so fast and so high in Egypt as Jeroboam rose. In a short space of time the fugitive overseer of Solomon's works had actually become the son-in-law of Pharaoh himself. Jeroboam was a born king and statesman; and both Israel and Egypt, both heaven and earth, confessed it to be so. And if only Jeroboam had tarried the Lord's leisure, and had kept his heart clean and humble, Jeroboam would soon have been king over all Israel, he and his sons, till the Messiah came Himself to sit down on David's undivided throne.

All this time, matters went on from bad to worse in Jerusalem, till Solomon died and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead. But with all that God's prophets and God's providences could do, neither Solomon nor his son altered their insane and suicidal ways one iota. In their utter exasperation

and despair the oppressed people at last took the strong and desperate step of sending a secret embassy to Egypt to beseech Jeroboam to return and deliver them from their miseries. And Jeroboam left Egypt at once, and came back with the Hebrew ambassadors. And, whatever may have been in Jeroboam's heart, no fault at all can be found with the words of his ultimatum to Rehoboam. 'Thy father made our yoke grievous; now, therefore, make thou the grievous service of thy father and his heavy yoke lighter, and we will serve thee.' But Rehoboam was demented enough to answer Jeroboam and the people with this insolence: 'My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.' At that, 'To your tents, O Israel,' rose the cry of rebellion till it rent the air. 'Now see to thine own house, O David.' So Israel rebelled against the house of David that day. And Jeroboam was made king over the ten tribes that day. There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only.

Now, here is our first admonition. Had Jeroboam on the day of his coronation, and henceforth, but taken Ahijah home to be his counsellor, Jeroboam had ability enough, and divine right enough, to have built up Israel into a great kingdom for God and for himself. But Jeroboam never loved Ahijah. He both feared and hated Ahijah. He was never at home, as we say, with Ahijah. He was never happy when he was alone with Ahijah. His heart, neither on the wall nor on the throne, was ever single enough for Ahijah's all-searching

eyes. And thus it was that Satan still kept his place in Jeroboam's heart, and was still Jeroboam's counsellor in all the affairs of the state, and in all the affairs of the family, till Jeroboam's great fall, from which he and his people never recovered, came about in this way. The ten tribes continued to go up to Jerusalem to Solomon's temple to worship God. And as they did so Jeroboam began to fear lest, in their worship together, Judah and Israel should both so return to the Lord together, that the breach in the kingdom would be healed, and he and his son cast out of his rebellious throne. The fact is, we have here before us in black and white, to this day, the very identical words that Jeroboam at that time spake in his heart. He said this in his heart: 'If my people go up to do service in this way in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the hearts of this people turn back to Rehoboam, and they will kill me and my son with me.' Whereupon Jeroboam took counsel, and made two unclean idols of gold, and said, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. You are not to suppose that Jeroboam was so stupid as to believe what he said and did that day. No. But he knew how stupid, and, indeed, how brutish at bottom his people were, as well as how superstitious. He knew well, also, how party spirit and ill-will had all along prevailed between Samaria and Jerusalem; and, the bad man that he was, Jeroboam deliberately set himself to traffic, and to establish his throne, in

the sensuality, in the stupidity, and in the ill-will of his hoodwinked subjects.

But, happily for us all, there is nothing in God's name to usward that is more sure and more true than is His long suffering, and His immense patience, and the many calls to repentance that He sends us before He finally casts us off. And, lest Jeroboam should lose himself through his fear and hate at Ahijah, God actually condescended to set the old and faithful prophet aside and to send a new prophet to Jeroboam: a prophet whose eyes had not yet read Jeroboam's heart, and against whom Jeroboam could have taken up no umbrage. Unless we both know ourselves and hate ourselves, we shall be certain both to hate and put away from us the preacher who tells us to our faces what is in our heart, as Jeroboam hated and put away Ahijah; which hatred of Jeroboam at him was all the time one of Ahijah's surest seals, both to himself and to Jeroboam, that he was a true prophet of the heart-searching God.

With all that, Jeroboam was not a common man. And Jeroboam's sins were not the sins of a common man. It is only kings, and kings' counsellors, and popes, and bishops, and ministers, and elders, and such like, who can sin and make nations and churches and congregations to sin. But they can do it. And they are doing it every day. All who divide, and keep divided, nations, and churches, and families, and friends in order to make a name, or a living, or a party, or just a

despite for themselves out of such divisions, they are the true seed of Jeroboam. All who inflame and perpetuate such divisions lest they should lose their stake of money, or of influence, or of occupation, or of pure ill-will; all able men who prostitute their talents to write or speak about men on the other side, as they would not like themselves to be spoken or written about—let them lay it to heart in whose lot they shall surely stand when every man shall give an account of himself to God. But common and mean men are not incapacitated and shut out by their commonness and meanness from sharing in Jeroboam's royal sin. The commonest and meanest man among us has more than enough of this terrible power of both sinning himself and making other men to sin. Every man among us has, in countless ways and on countless occasions, first sinned himself and then made other men to sin. Go back honestly into your past life and see. Take time; take a true light back with you, and look around, and see. Come up, as you shall one day be compelled to come up through your past life whether you will or no, and see. Some of them are dead and gone to judgment with the lesson in sin you gave them laid up before God against you. Some of them are still sinning here, and are prolonging your days in teaching a new generation to sin your sin. Sin yourself, if you will sin. But, as you would have a drop of water to cool your tongue in that torment, do not make other men to sin. Break the Sabbath law, neglect God's house, do despite to His means of

grace, drink, bet, pollute yourself, scoff, blaspheme: your soul is your own. Make your bed in hell, if you will have it so; but, as God will smite you for it, let alone the young, and the innocent, and the pure, and the unsuspecting. So Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel to sin, though dead, yet speaketh.

LIII

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET



T was an high day of idolatry at Bethel. And, all the time, Bethel, of all the cities of Israel, was one of the most ancient and the most sacred. Bethel, as its name bears, was none other but the house of God, and it was the very gate of heaven. Bethel was built on that very spot on which their father Jacob had slept and dreamed when he was on his lonely way to Padan-aram; and it is that very heaven out of which the ladder was let down on Jacob's pillow that is to-day to be darkened by the unclean incense of Jeroboam's altar-fires. It was a brave step in Jeroboam to set up his false gods at Bethel, of all places in the land. And he needed a stout heart and a profane to support him as he stood up to kindle with his own hands the heathen fires of idolatry and impurity at Bethel.

Where angels down the lucid stair
Came hovering to our sainted sires,
Now, in the twilight glare
The heathen's wizard fires.

And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and

Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And the man of God cried against the altar of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar! And then he foretold the fall of the altar, and with it the fall of him who stood in his royal robes that day ministering to his unclean gods at that altar. And how Jeroboam's hand was withered that moment; how it was healed immediately at the intercession of the man of God; how Jeroboam invited the prophet to come home with him to eat and to drink and to get a reward; and how the prophet answered the king that he had the command of the Lord neither to eat bread nor to drink water in that polluted land, but to return home to Judah as soon as he had delivered his prophetic burden—all that is to be read in the thirteenth chapter of First Kings. At the same time, we are not told so much as this great prophet's name. He was wholly worthy thus far to have his name held up aloft along with the names of Samuel and Elijah themselves, for he stood up alone against Jeroboam and against all Israel and nailed the curse of God to Jeroboam's altar under the king's own eyes. We would hold his name in more than royal honour if we knew it. But for some reason or other of her own the Bible holds his great name back. This great man of God comes out of a cloud, he shines for a splendid moment before all men's eyes, and then he dies under a cloud. Alas, my brother!

As the man of God from Judah so nobly refuses Jeroboam's royal hospitality, I am reminded of Lord Napier. On one occasion his lordship was

sent down to Scotland by the Queen on a royal errand of review and arbitration between a great duke and his poor crofters. The duke, the administration of whose estate was to be inquired into, was good enough to offer his lordship his ducal hospitality for as long as the royal session of review lasted. But her Majesty's Deputy felt that neither his Royal Mistress nor himself could afford to be for one moment compromised, or even suspected, by her poorest subject; and therefore it was that his lordship excused himself from the duke's table, and took up his quarters in the little wayside inn. 'At any rate, you will come to the manse,' said the minister, who was on the crofters' side. 'Thank you,' said Napier. 'But in your college days you must have read Plutarch about Cæsar's wife. No, thank you.' And his lordship lodged all his time in the little hotel, and went back to his Royal Mistress when his work was done, not only with clean hands, but without even a suspicion attaching to her or to him. 'Come home with me and refresh thyself.' But the man of God said to the king, 'If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water with thee.' So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came to Bethel.

Just as the man of God is setting out to go back to Judah with a hungry belly indeed, but with a good conscience, we are taken by the hand and are led into the house of an old prophet who dwells at Bethel. Yes. There are prophets and prophets' sons all this time at Bethel. Only, they had their

domiciles and their doles from Jeroboam's bounty on the strict condition that they kept at home and kept silence. Well, this old Bethelite prophet was keeping at home and was keeping silence when his sons burst in upon him with the great news of the day. Father, you should have come with us ! We asked you to come. What a day it has been ! And what a man of God we have seen ! Till they told him all that we are told about Jeroboam, and his altar, and the man of God from Judah, and his cry that shook down the altar, and the king's withered hand, and the prayer of the man of God, and the king's hospitality, and the man of God's refusal of the king's hospitality. 'What way went he home?' demanded the old prophet of his excited sons. 'Saddle me the ass,' he instantly ordered. 'Art thou the man of God from Judah?' he asked, as he overtook the man of God sitting under an oak. 'Come home with me and eat bread.' 'I may not eat bread, nor drink water by the word of the Lord,' said the man of God. 'But I am a prophet also as thou art,' said the old Bethelite; 'and an angel bade me bring thee back.' But it was a lie, adds the sacred writer. So the man of God rose and went back and did eat bread and drink water. And so on; till a lion met him in the way home that night, and slew him because he had gone back. And when the old Bethelite prophet, who had deceived him, heard of it, he mourned over him, and said, 'Alas, my brother !' And he said to his sons, 'Bury me beside this man of God. Lay my bones beside his bones.'

What is it that makes the decrepit old prophet of Bethel post at such a pace after the man of God who is on his way home to Judah? Has his conscience at last been awakened? Have the tidings of his delighted sons filled the poor old time-server with bitter remorse for his fat table and for his dumb pulpit? Or, is it deadly envy and revenge at the man who has so stolen his sons' hearts that day till they are about to set off to Judah to go to school to this man of God? It is too late now for him to command his sons' reverence and love. And how can he ever forgive the man who has so taken from him his crown as a prophet and as a father? 'Saddle me the ass,' he shouted. And the decayed old creature rode down the Judean road at a pace he had not ridden since he used, as a godly youth, to be sent out on errands of life and death and mercy from Samuel's School of Mount Ephraim. If lies will do it; if flattery, flesh, and wine will do it; if there is man or woman in Bethel that will do it,—that Judean prophet's pride shall be brought down to-day! 'Saddle me the ass!' he thundered. So they saddled him the ass, and he rode after the man of God. 'I am a prophet as thou art!' But he lied unto him.

Let us all take care of the swift and sure collapse that always comes on us after every great excitement. As sure as we are made of flesh, and blood, and brains, and nerves, and feelings, a great reaction always takes place in body and mind after any unusually great effort of body and mind. And especially after any great preaching effort. After

you have faced for hours a surging congregation, and have worked yourself and them up to heaven,—to see them scatter, and to be left worn out and alone,—then comes the hour of temptation: a temptation that has been fatal in more ways than one to some temperaments of men. Some temperaments are tempted at such times to eat and drink and smoke and talk all night to any listener if they have done well; and the same temperaments are just as much tempted to silence, and gloom, and bad temper if they have not done well: if they have not come up to themselves, and have not got the praise they worked for and expected. We are not told why this great man of God stopped short so soon on his way home from Bethel, and sat down so soon under one of the oaks of Bethel. He had done a splendid day's work. Never prophet of God did a more splendid day's work. But our hearts sink as we see him stop short, and then take his seat under that tempting tree. What was the matter? We are not told. He may have been very hungry by this time, and he may have begun to repent that he had not accepted the penitent king's hospitality. Who knows what good might have come of it had he, God's acknowledged prophet, been seen sitting in the place of honour at the royal table? Had he not been somewhat short, and sharp, and churlish after his great battle with Jeroboam's altar? Stern men have often been known to soften and secretly repent of their too-ascetical self-denial. They have felt it hard to have to pay the whole self-denying vow which they made when some great exaltation

was upon them. Some men have gone so far, indeed, as to call back in imagination the hour of temptation, and wish that they had not let it slip so soon. Well, then, if that was the case with the man of God from Judah,—here is the forbidden fruit of Bethel back and at his open mouth this moment: ‘I am a prophet as thou art, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying: Bring him back to eat and to drink.’ So he went back with him to his house.

As a rule let ministers sup at home on Sabbath nights; and let them sup alone. As a rule. It cannot always be acted on, but it is a good rule, nevertheless. Many a good sermon has been drowned dead in the supper, and in the supper-talk that followed it. Your people will not care one straw what you say to them from the pulpit if you sup heartily with them immediately after it. All the great awe of the morning went off the Bethelite prophet’s sons and servants, as the man of God sat and ate and drank and laughed and talked over his supper that night. And the old Bethelite himself was quite at home, hail-fellow-well-met, with the terrible preacher of that awakening morning.

I was once spending a Sabbath in a well-known farm-house in Glenisla, and after church the old laird and I began to talk about John Duncan and his great sermons when he was a probationer in a chapel of ease in the neighbourhood. After supper and worship I was anxious to hear more about Dr. Duncan, and to hear more of his old sermons read. ‘No,’ said the old patriarch to me; ‘No: no more to-

night ; we always take our candles immediately after family worship.' How often has that rebuke come back to me as another Sabbath night closed with all kinds of talk after public and family worship ; talk that but too plainly had blotted out for ever all that had been said and heard that day. It is not possible that we should all spend the last hours of the Sabbath alone ; but, most certainly, many a deep impression has been obliterated as the preacher ate and drank and talked and laughed after his solemn sermon.

And then this—follow your conscience to the end, let men and angels say what they will. A man is but a man : an angel is but an angel : and false prophets have come out into the world. But conscience is more than conscience. Conscience is God. Conscience is Immanuel, God in us. My conscience, accordingly, is more to me than all prophets and apostles and preachers, and very angels themselves. If that had been Paul sitting under that oak, and had the old Bethelite deceiver come riding on his ass, with his certificate of office, and with his story about an angel to Paul, we have Paul's answer to him in the Galatians : ' If an angel from heaven bids me go against God in my conscience, let him be accursed.' And the old deceiver would have fallen down and would have reported at home that God was in the man of God from Judah of a truth. So would the secrets of his heart have been made manifest. ' Conscience,' says Sanderson, ' is a fast friend, and a fierce foe.' ' I take my ears,' said King Charles, ' to other preachers ; but I take

my conscience to Mr. Sanderson.' And go you to the preacher who speaks closest to your conscience, whatever denomination he preaches in, and then hold fast by your enlightened and awakened conscience against men and devils.

At the same time, to be slain by a lion on the way home was surely much too sharp a punishment for taking one's supper with a prophet and an angel; uneasy conscience and all. But then, 'some sins,' says that noble piece, the Westminster Larger Catechism, 'receive their aggravation from the persons offending; if they be of riper age, greater experience in grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, and as such are guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.' The very case, to the letter, of the man of God out of Judah. The sublimity of his public services that morning had henceforth set up a corresponding standard for his private life. And this is one of our best compensations for preaching the grace of God and the law of Christ. Our office quickens our conscience; it makes the law cut deeper and deeper into our hearts every day; and it compels us to a public and private life we would otherwise have escaped. Preaching recoils with terrible strokes on the preacher. It curtails his liberty in a most tyrannical way; it tracks him through all his life in a most remorseless manner. Think it out well, and count the cost, before you become a minister. For, it was surely a little sin, if ever there was a little sin, to sup that Sabbath night at an old prophet's table, and that, too, on the invitation of

an angel. But the lion that met the disobedient prophet that night did not reason that way.

‘Bury me,’ said the remorseful old man to his sons standing in tears round his miserable deathbed, ‘bury me in the same grave with the bones of the man of God out of Judah.’ And the old prophet’s sons so buried their father. And an awful grave that was in Bethel, with an awful epitaph upon it. Now, suppose this. Suppose that you were buried on the same awful principle,—in whose grave would your bones lie waiting together with his till the last trump to stand forth before God and man together? And what would your epitaph and his be? Would it be this: ‘Here lie the liar and his victim’? Or would it be this: ‘Here lie the seducer and the seduced’? Or would it be this: ‘Here lie the hater and him he hated down to death’? Or would it be this: ‘Here lie the tempting host and his too willing to be tempted guest’? Or, if you are a minister, would it be this: ‘Here lies a dumb dog, and beside him one who was a crowded preacher in the morning of his days, but a castaway before night’? Alas, my brother!

LIV

REHOBAM

JUST by one insolent and swaggering word King Rehoboam lost for ever the ten tribes of Israel. And all Rehoboam's insane and suicidal history is written in our Bibles for the admonition and instruction of all hot-blooded, ill-natured, and insolent-spoken men among ourselves.

The beginning of it all was the domestic disorders and the cancerous immoralities of David's house. And then it was the heathen idolatry and the heathen immorality and the reckless and exasperating extravagance of Solomon's declining years. Prophet after prophet had been sent of God to Solomon because of his shameful apostasies, but it was all in vain. Solomon's old advisers besought his son Rehoboam, as soon as he had sat down on the throne of his father Solomon, to attend to the complaints of the people, and to lighten their terrible burdens. But Rehoboam shut his ears to the wisdom of the elders of Israel, and answered the oppressed people in the insolent and insulting words that the young men about him had put in his mouth. 'My father made your yoke

heavy, and I will add to your yoke ; my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.' At that the long-suppressed shout rose and rang through the angry land, 'To your tents, O Israel ! Now see to thine own house, David !' So Israel rebelled, says the sacred writer, against the house of David to this day.

One might well be tempted to think that the sacred writer had told Rehoboam's history wholly in vain, so often has his insane folly been repeated east and west since his fatal day. And in no land has his folly been oftener repeated or better written about than just in our own England.

I am solicited [says Queen Katherine], not by a few,
And those of true condition, that your subjects
Are in great grievance ; there have been commissions
Sent down among 'em, which have flaw'd the heart
Of all their loyalties ; wherein, although,
My good lord cardinal, they vent reproaches
Most bitterly on you, as putter on
Of these exactions, yet the king our master—
Whose honour heaven shield from soil !—even he
escapes not

Language unmannerly, yea, such which breaks
The sides of loyalty, and almost appears
In loud rebellion.—I would your highness
Would give it quick consideration, for
There is no primer business.

Our own Henrys, and Jameses, and Charleses, and Georges—the books of the kings of Israel were eminently written for their learning. But preaching like Bishop Hall's *Contemplation* on Rehoboam—if the light that is at our kings' courts be dark-

ness, how great is that darkness. And such servile preaching as Joseph Hall's too often was, went on till the kings of England lost, not their kingdoms only, but their own heads to the bargain. Take Joseph Hall away from court, and there is not a racier or a more sagacious preacher in England; but put James's lawn sleeves on Bishop Hall, and there are few in their hour of temptation who are more contemptible. How much more true and just and wise is Dean Stanley: 'The demands of the nation were just. The old counsellors gave such advice as might have been found in the Book of Proverbs. Only the insolence of the younger courtiers imagined the possibility of coercing a great people. It was a doomed revolution.'

Every morning, all the last wet summer, my children and I read an hour in the best story-book in the world. And having Rehoboam in my mind, we came upon this about Coriolanus: 'But on the other side, for lack of education, he was so choleric, and so impatient, that he would yield to no living creature: which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man's conversation. They could not be acquainted with him as one citizen careth to be with another in the city. His behaviour was so unpleasant to them by reason of a certain insolent and stern manner he had, which, because it was too lordly, was disliked. And, to say truly, the greatest benefit that learning bringeth men unto is this: that it teacheth them that be rude and rough of nature, by compass and rule of reason, to be civil and courteous, and to like better the

mean state than the higher. But Martius was a man too full of passion and choler, and too much given over to self-will and opinion, and lacked the gravity and affability that is gotten with judgment of learning and reason. He remembered not how wilfulness is the thing of all the world which the governor of a state should shun. For a man that wishes to live in this world must needs have patience which lusty bloods [like Rehobam's young counsellors] make but a mock at.' Reading the same charming book another wet morning we came on this: 'Now, Cæsar immediately won many men's goodwill at Rome through his eloquence in pleading their causes, and the people loved him marvellously also because of the courteous manner he had to speak with every man, and to use them gently, being more ceremonious therein than was looked for in one of his years. How little account Cæsar made of his diet, this example doth prove it. Supping one night in Milan with his friend Valerius Lco, there was served asparagus to his board and oil of perfume put into it instead of salad oil. Cæsar simply ate it and found no fault, but reproved his friends who were offended: and told them that it had been enough to have abstained to eat of that they disliked, and not to shame their friend, and how much he lacked good manners who found fault with his friend.' The whole chapter, indeed, is one of Plutarch's masterpieces. Though the great republican does not like Cæsar, yet his instinct as an author and his nobility as a man compel Plutarch to extol continually Cæsar's exquisite

courtesy, his noble urbanity, and his unfailing good manners.

True, there are neither kings, nor kings' sons, nor kings' counsellors, nor kings' chaplains here, but there are plenty of hot-blooded, hectoring, insolent, and ill-natured men. There are husbands, and fathers, and masters, and many other kinds and classes of men to whom this Scripture comes direct from God. Husbands especially. You husbands, never, all your days, speak an impatient or an angry or an insolent word to your wife. And if you have already lost your fireside, which it is worse to lose than a kingdom; if you have spoken not one angry and cruel word, but many, which cannot now be unspoken, it is not too late even yet. Even if things have been said between you and your wife that neither of you can ever forget, your whole life is not lost. At the worst, if you both like, if you are both able, meat may yet come to you both out of the eater; that is to say, out of your angry, insolent, heart-cutting words to one another. You may gather quietness, and self-command, and a bridle for your mouth, and a balm for two sore hearts out of the carcass of your all-but-dead tenderness to one another. When the next debatable matter comes up between you, let it not come up. Put your foot upon it. Keep your foot firm down upon it.

Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul,
And change to purpose strong.

All Scriptures are not written for all men alike. Some men are already strong men and wise masters of themselves. There are men from whom you will never hear one angry, sulky, insolent word all their days. But there are other men whose lips simply spit hell-fire as often as they open them upon your heart.

One would think that if there was any one of the near relationships of human life more than another that would of itself absolutely secure kindness, and tenderness, and affability, and love, it would be that of a father. But, as a matter of fact, it is often the very opposite. You never see more impatience, and harshness, and sullenness, and sourness than you see in some fathers. Why is that so, I wonder? It is very difficult to explain and account for it. Let every silent, sulky, churlish father watch and examine the working of his own heart till he understands and overcomes this monstrosity in himself. It is against nature. But it cannot be denied that it is very common. It is not for nothing, you may be very sure, that Paul gives to fathers this, at first reading, somewhat startling counsel, not to provoke their children to wrath. The apostle must often have seen it done. He must often have suffered from seeing it done. He must often have felt sore in his heart for such unhappy children, else he would never have said what he says in his Epistle to the Ephesians. He must often have sat at tables where the children were incessantly corrected and rebuked and exasperated. He must often have seen all-but-innocent

children nagged and worried into answers and actions the whole blame of which he laid on their fathers and their mothers. Treat your children, he says to us, as your Father treats you. For His name is merciful, and gracious, and long-suffering, and slow to wrath. Study your children. Command your temper towards your children. Do not worry, and vex, and insult, and exasperate your children. 'When they do right, make a point of praising them openly,' says Cecil. 'And when they do wrong, reprehend them secretly.' A word of encouragement, a touch of the hand, a smile even; how easy to a wise and loving father it is to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and how happy it makes him and them. But how hard and impossible all that is to a churl and a curmudgeon.

And King Rehoboam consulted with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I should answer this people? And they advised the king, saying, If thou wilt answer them, and speak good words unto them, then they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men. The best sermon I know on that scene is to be read in a letter of Mr. Ruskin's to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. The editor had said in a leading article that it is the hardest thing in the world in these days to find a good servant. And that called out Mr. Ruskin the same day. I will not spoil his English. 'Sir,' he wrote, 'you so seldom write nonsense that you will, I am sure,

pardon your friends for telling you when you do so. Your article on servants to-day is sheer nonsense. It is just as easy and just as difficult now to get good servants as ever it was. You may have them, as you may have pines and peaches, for the growing ; or you may even buy them good, if you can persuade the good growers to spare them off their walls ; but you cannot get them by political economy and the law of supply and demand. Sir, there is only one way to have good servants, and that is to be worthy of being well served. All nature and all humanity will serve a good master, and will rebel against an ignoble one. There is no surer test of the quality of a nation than the quality of its servants. A wise nation will have philosophers in its servants' hall, a knavish nation will have knaves there, and a kindly nation will have friends there. Only let it be remembered that " kindness " means, as with your child, so with your servant, not indulgence, but rare.' And then Mr. Ruskin winds up the whole correspondence with an apt and beautiful reference to Xenophon's *Economics*, and an advice to all his lady readers to get the old Greek book by heart, as the most perfect ideal of kingly character and kingly government ever given in literature, as also the ideal of domestic life.

No ; there can be no manner of doubt that Mr. Ruskin is wholly right. Our servants would never leave us if we were sufficiently kind to them. Unless, indeed, it were to go to serve those who had sworn to be still kinder to them. And we would get two men's, two women's work out of each one

of them while they are with us if we were only twice more kind to them. A word of recognition and appreciation; a word of trust and confidence and real respect now and then; a nod, a smile as you meet them in the passage or on the stair; once in a while to eat a meal or a part of a meal with them; to give them now and then the gift or the loan of a book that has done yourself real good to read, and to say so. O yes! the hearts and minds of men and women are neither better nor worse than ever they were. They live upon love, and esteem, and respect, and praise, just as much as ever they did. Just try them and see.

LV

JOSIAH

 JOSIAH was born with a tender heart, says Huldah the prophetess. Josiah's father and grandfather were the two worst kings that had ever sold Israel into slavery. And Josiah inherited from his father and from his grandfather a name of shame, an undermined throne, a divided and a distracted kingdom, a national religion and a public worship debased, and, indeed, bestialised; and, over all, a fearful looking for of judgment. And all that broke and made tender Josiah's heart from the day of his birth. We are told nothing of Josiah's unhappy mother. But may we not be allowed to believe that her heart also was made tender within her by all that she had come through, till she bore and brought up her son Josiah to be the most tender-hearted man in all Israel, till Mary bore and brought up her child to be the most tender-hearted man in all the world?

If a boy has a good mother and a good minister he is all but independent of his father. And with Jedidah for his mother, and with Jeremiah for his minister, both Manasseh his grandfather and Amon

his father taken together did not succeed in corrupting and destroying young Josiah. The tender heart of the young prince took all the good out of his so terribly untoward circumstances, and escaped all the evil, till Jeremiah was able to pronounce this noble panegyric over the too early grave of Josiah,—‘That it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth; and that it is also good for such a man quietly to hope and to wait for the salvation of the Lord.’ With Jeremiah every Sabbath-day among the ruins of the temple, and with Jedidah every week-day at home, notwithstanding all Josiah’s drawbacks and heart-breaks,—or, rather, because of them,—I do not wonder that Josiah soon became the very best sovereign that had ever sat on the throne of David.

Early in the days of his youth Josiah began to seek after the God of David his father. That is to say,—however well a boy may have been brought up; however good a mother he may have had, and however efficient and faithful a minister, the time soon comes when every young man must seek his own God for himself. Neither David’s God, nor Jedidah’s God, nor Jeremiah’s God will suffice for Josiah. Josiah is an orphan and a prince with a terrible heritage of woe. And a second-hand and a merely educational and hereditary knowledge of God will not suffice for Josiah’s singular and extraordinary case. Josiah cannot rest till he is able to say for himself—‘Thou art my God. Early will I seek thee. O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my

bonds.' And, all the time, while Josiah still sought the Lord, and till he found Him, the tenderness of Josiah's heart kept him safe and unspotted from all the corruptions of the world. A boy will be at a school where all kinds of evil are rampant. He will then enter a workshop or an office where so many young men go astray. But there has always been something about that boy that has kept him through it all both pure and pious. And it has been his tender heart that has done it. Augustine has his finest passage in point. Monica's son, like Jedidah's son, had drunk in the name of Jesus Christ with his mother's milk ; and all the folly of philosophy, and all the sweetness of sensuality could never seduce nor satisfy Augustine's heart. God had made Augustine's great heart for Himself; and neither true nor false, neither sweet nor bitter, neither good nor bad, could solace or satiate that deep, predestinated heart. Nothing, and no one, but God Himself. So it was with Josiah. And so it was with ourselves. And so it has been, and so it will be, with thousands of the sons of mothers like Jedidah, and with thousands of the scholars and young communicants of ministers like Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

Josiah was only twenty years of age when he set about a national reformation of religion as radical and as complete as anything that Martin Luther or John Calvin or John Knox themselves ever undertook. But with this immense difference. Both Luther and Calvin and Knox had the whole Word of God in their hands both to inspire them and to

guide them and to support them in their tremendous task. But Josiah had not one single book or chapter or verse even of the Word of God in his heathen day. The Five Books of Moses were as completely lost out of the whole land long before Josiah's day as much so as if Moses had never lifted a pen. And thus it was that Josiah's reformation had a creativeness, an originality, an enterprise, and a boldness about it, such that in all these respects it has completely eclipsed all subsequent reformations and revivals, the greatest and the best. The truth is, the whole of that immense movement that resulted in the religious regeneration of Jerusalem and Judah in Josiah's day,—it all sprang originally and immediately out of nothing else but Josiah's extraordinary tenderness of heart. The Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world shone with extraordinary clearness in Josiah's tender heart and open mind. And Josiah walked in that Light and obeyed it, till it became within him an overmastering sense of divine duty and an irresistible direction and drawing of the Divine Hand; and till he performed a work for God and for Israel second to no work that has ever been performed under the greatest and the best of the prophets and kings of Israel combined. It is a very noble spectacle. This royal youth of but about twenty years old, and the son and heir of Manasseh and Amon, having the intellectual boldness and the spiritual originality to take all his statesmanship, and all his churchmanship, and all his international politics, and all his righteous wars,

as well as all his personal and household religion, all out of his own tender heart. There never was a nobler proof of our Lord's great New Testament principle that he that doeth the will of God shall know the doctrine. For it was in the progress of that reformation and revival of religion which his own tender heart had alone dictated to him that the long-lost law of Moses was recovered. And recovered in as many divine and commanding and rewarding words, so as to sanction and seal, as if from heaven itself, all the bold and believing task that Josiah had wholly of himself undertaken. We all profess to believe in special providences and in divine interpositions; but, surely, the extraordinary providence that brought to the light of day and put into Josiah's hands the long-lost law of Moses concerning the worship and morals of Israel was an incomparable miracle of the Divine grace and goodness. Josiah was worthy; and God's recognition and reward of Josiah's worth came to Josiah at the very best moment, and in the very best way; for it came to him as the very law of the living God; and that, too, as good as if it had been written on the spot by God's own living hand. Humanly speaking, we should never have heard of the Five Books of Moses, as we have heard of them, but for Josiah's tender heart. Humanly speaking, and popularly speaking, our Old Testament would have begun with the Book of Joshua but for Josiah's tenderheart. Had Josiah's heart not been tender toward the house of God, the temple would have been let lie in its utter ruin, till the buried Books of Moses would have been to this

day the possession and the prey of the moles and the bats. Moses, says Matthew Henry, had a narrow turn for his life in Josiah's day. You do well to tremble at the thought of how near you were to the total loss of Moses and his law. And you are almost angry at Matthew Henry for telling you what you did not know before. But try your own hand on Moses and Josiah, and explain to me how you think you could have had Moses in your Bible but for Josiah ; and, again, but for Josiah's tender heart. I defy you to do it. At any rate,—this is far more to your purpose—be sure of this, that both Moses, and David, and Paul, and John, and Jesus Christ Himself, are all as good as never written ; they are as good as completely lost to you ; till you take to them a tender heart, and out of that, a reformed and a repaired life. It will only be after your heart is tender and your life repaired that Hilkiah and Shaphan and Huldah the prophetess will be able to discover and to read to you either the law of Moses, or the grace and truth that has come by Jesus Christ. Till then, your Bible also is as good as buried under the ruin and rubbish of your fallen life. But when your heart is made tender by your father's sins and by your own ; as also, by all God's providences towards you, and by all His grace in you ; and when, in addition, your life has been made believing and obedient ; then God's Word will more and more flash out continually upon you, a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

When the law of the Lord, as it was written in

the newly disinterred Books of Moses, was read for the first time to Josiah, and while Shaphan the scribe was still reading it, Josiah rose up and rent to pieces his royal robe. After having looked for it, I do not read that Shaphan the scribe rent his robe, nor Ahikam the son of Shaphan, nor Hilkiah the priest, nor Achbor, nor Asahiah the servant of Josiah, nor Huldah the prophetess. Josiah alone rent his robe as the law was read. Their hearts were not so tender as was Josiah's heart. They had not come through so much from their youth up. The iron of God had not entered their hearts, and the law of God after it. The finding of the law was, no doubt, a great event in sacred archæology, as well as in sacred letters, to Shaphan and Hilkiah; but it did not come home to their hearts as it all came home to Josiah's heart. It was Moses speaking to them: but it was God Himself speaking to Josiah. It was an old book to them: but it was the Word of the Living God to him. He felt—such was his tender heart—that all he had attained to, and all he had reformed and done, was just nothing at all while so much remained to be and to do. He felt, as Isaiah felt, that all his righteousnesses were but so much filthy rags. If you have any real interest in these things; if you care to go to the sources and are not indolently content with my poor paraphrase of these intensely interesting Scriptures: if you are a true student, a true sinner, and a true reformer of yourself and of the ruins that lie all around you—you will read 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles to yourselves, if only to

see what a reformer both of himself and of his whole land Josiah was: and all that out of his own tender heart. And, best of all, how unsatisfied, and how tender-hearted he was with all he had done. All which, you must know, was the Holy Ghost in Josiah's tender heart before the Holy Ghost had yet been given. Has He even yet been given in that way to you? Do you rend your heart every day as you hear and read the Word of God? Or, are your clothes as whole, and your hearts, as were Hilkiab's and Shaphan's, and all the rest of the merely official and salaried servants of the palace and the temple? On the other hand, if all you have done only adds itself on to what you have not done: if your best works break your heart even more than your worst: if it is no rhetoric that all your righteousnesses are so much filthy rags: then, I wish much to assure you, that so it always is when the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word of God, either read or heard. Jeremiah—you all know the proverbial penitent, and the contrite heart, that Jeremiah was—but Jeremiah did not think that. He did not feel that. Oh that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears! wept that hard-hearted and dry-eyed prophet. 'I can sin much,' cries holy Lancelot Andrewes to God every night, 'but I cannot repent much. Woe is me for my hard and dry heart. Give me, O God, a molten heart. Give tears. Give the grace of tears. Give me, O Lord, this great grace. None were so welcome to me. Not all the good things of this life are to

be coveted by me in comparison with tears. Tears such as Thou didst give to David, and to Jeremiah, and to Josiah, and to Peter, and to her out of whom were cast seven devils. O God, give the chief of sinners some tears for his great sin, and for 'Thy great salvation.' And the Word of God has never yet been aright read to you, or aright heard and believed by you, unless you feel like Josiah, and Jeremiah, and Peter, and Andrewes every day. Your religion is not worth one straw, as true religion, unless it is every day breaking and making more tender your hard heart. Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep. But blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh for it all when all tears shall have been wiped from your eyes.

Only, if you will have Josiah's tender heart in this hard-hearted world, you will have to pay a heavy price for it. Josiah paid a heavy price at the last for his tender heart. Josiah's tender heart, after it had done him all the good that we have seen, and more, at last it did him this terrible evil, that it lost him his life for this life. Josiah's tender heart was the cause of his too early death. The narrative is obscure and perplexed, and it lends itself to be read in more ways than one. But as I read Josiah's end it is something like this,—The king's tender heart led him out to do battle against the hereditary enemy of Israel and the oppressor and persecutor of the weak; in short, he went out against the Sultan of Turkey of that day. And the Judge of all the earth and the God

of battles, for His own deep ends, let that battle go against Josiah, till Josiah said, Have me away, for I am wounded. Being unsuccessful, as we say, Josiah is almost universally blamed for letting his tender heart take up the sword. But I, for one, am quite content to leave Josiah's tender-hearted statesmanship to the arbitrament of the last day. I, for one, will applaud Josiah till my applause is reversed by Him whose tender heart took Him also to His death. And till Jesus Christ from the great white throne condemns and sentences Josiah for his too tender heart, I shall continue to read this to myself on his tombstone in the valley of Megiddo:—This,

THE REMEMBRANCE OF JOSIAH IS LIKE THE PERFUME OF THE APOTHECARY, AND HIS NAME IS LIKE MUSIC AT A BANQUET OF WINE. FOR HIS PURE AND HOLY YOUTH JEHOVAH WAS HIS SHIELD IN THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION, TILL HE BEHAVED HIMSELF RIGHTLY IN THE CONVERSION OF HIS PEOPLE, AND TILL HE TOOK AWAY ALL THEIR ABOMINATIONS OF INIQUITY. HE DIRECTED HIS HEART TO THE LORD, AND HE ESTABLISHED THE WORSHIP OF GOD: AND ALL BECAUSE HIS HEART WAS SO TENDER. THE REMEMBRANCE OF JOSIAH IN JUDAH AND IN JERUSALEM IS LIKE THE PERFUME OF THE APOTHECARY, AND LIKE MUSIC AT
▲ BANQUET OF WINE.

LVI

ELIJAH

HE prophet Elijah towers up like a mountain in Gilead above all the other prophets. There is a solitary grandeur about Elijah that is all his own. There is a mystery and an un-earthliness about Elijah that is all his own. There is a volcanic suddenness, and a volcanic violence, indeed, about all Elijah's descents upon us and all his disappearances from us. We call him Elijah the Tishbite, but we are no wiser of that. We do not even know where Tishbe is. Elijah has neither father nor mother. As Elijah never died, so he was never born, as we are born. Elijah came from God, and he went to God. Elijah stood before God till God could dispense with and spare Elijah out of His presence no longer. Elijah's very name will tell you all that, and more than all that, concerning both Elijah and his father and his mother, Eli-jah—my God is Jehovah. You may know the hearts of fathers and mothers to some extent, even among ourselves, by the names they give to their children. And I leave you to judge what kind of a father and mother they must have been who so

boldly coined out of Moses, and out of their own hearts, this magnificent name for their circumcised child. Elijah had a heavenly name, but he had, to begin with, but an earthly nature. Elijah was a man, to begin with, subject to like passions as we are. Elijah was a man, indeed, of passions all compact. We never see Elijah that he is not subject to some passion or other. A passion of scorn and contempt; a passion of anger and revenge; a passion of sadness and dejection and despair; a passion of preaching; a passion of prayer. Elijah was a great man. There was a great mass of manhood in Elijah. He was a Mount-Sinai of a man, with a heart like a thunderstorm. That man among ourselves who has the most human nature in him and the most heart; the most heart and the most passion in his heart; the most love and the most hate; the most anger and the most meekness; the most scorn and the most sympathy; the most sunshine and the most melancholy; the most agony in prayer, and the most victorious assurance that, all the time, his prayer is already answered—that man is the likeliest of us all to the prophet Elijah; that man has Elijah's own mantle fallen upon him. Only, alas! there is no such man among us. There is no man among us fit, for one moment, to stand like Elijah before God.

Now, whatever is the matter with us that God has not an Elijah among us, or anything like an Elijah, it is not that we are wanting in passions. We have all plenty of passions; and too much,

since we are all so subject to our passions. What an ocean of all kinds of passions all our hearts are ; and lashed with what winds without rest. What dark depths of self-love are in all our hearts. And what a master-passion is that same self-love. Self-love is a serpent ; and, like the famous serpent in Scripture, it swallows up and swells out on all the other serpents of which our hearts are full. Yes ; we all have passions enough to make us not Elijahs and Ahabs only, but angels in heaven, or devils in hell. And our passions are every day doing that within us. All the difference between Elijah and Ahab was in the subjection of their passions. Elijah was a man of immensely stronger passions than poor Ahab ever was ; only Elijah's powerful passions all swept him up to heaven, whereas all Ahab's contemptible passions shouldered and shovelled and sucked him down to hell. Queen Jezebel, also, Ahab's wife, when she was still a woman-child, her passions were as sweet and pure and good and subject as were the passions of the Virgin Mary herself. The whole difference between Elijah and Ahab, and between Jezebel and the mother of our Lord was in their hearts' desires, till their hearts' desires grew up into all-consuming passions.

On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,
Reason the card, but passion is the gale.

May I govern my passions with absolute sway,
And grow wiser and better as my strength wears away.

And what a passionate preacher Elijah was.

You know the story of the play-actor who scouted the minister because he dawdled over his prayers and his sermons as if he was ashamed of his message. 'We act our parts in dead earnest,' he said; 'and that is the reason that you have to sell your empty churches to us to make our theatres out of them.'

Yea,

This man's brow, like to a title-page,
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume.
Thou tremblest, and the whiteness of thy cheek
Is apter than thy tongue to tell thy errand.

'Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me in this matter of preaching. Lord, be Thou my helper. Turn my dreamings,' implores the passionate Andrewes, 'into earnestness, my follies into cleansings of myself, my guilt into indignation, my past sin into all the greater fear for the future, my sloth into passionate desire, and my pollution into revenge. And enable me, O my God, to bend all my passions of faith, and love, and hate, and fear, revenge, and remorse, and what not, in upon my own salvation, and the salvation of my people!'

And then in prayer. The translators of the New Testament tell us that they have preserved the Apostle James's passionate idiom in the margin of the text, 'Elias with all his passions prayed in his prayer.' And I, for one, am for ever deep in their debt for their so doing, for the prophetic and apostolic idiom in the margin takes possession of my imagination. It touches my heart; it speaks to my conscience and that because, after all these

years of prayer, how seldom it is that we really 'pray in our prayers,' as the apostle tells us that the prophet prayed. We repeat choice passages of scripture in our prayers. We recite with studied pathos classical paragraphs out of Isaiah and Ezekiel. We praise one man and we blame another man in our prayers. We pronounce appreciations and we pass judgments in our prayers. We do everything in our prayers but truly pray. The Bible naturally shows a preference for men of like passions with itself; and the more of his passions any man puts into his prayer, the more space and the more praise the Bible gives to that man. Jacob was a prince in the passionateness of his prayer all that night at the Jabbok. What a tempest of passion broke upon the throne of God all that night. What a tempest of fear, and despair, and remorse, and self-accusation, of all indeed that was within Jacob's passionate heart. Jacob's raging passions really tore him to pieces that terrible night in his prayer. His very thigh-bones were twisted and torn out of their sockets, and his strongest sinews snapped like so many silly threads. There was not on the face of the earth another night of passion in prayer like that for the next two thousand years. Esau, also, often halted upon his thigh. But that was with hunting too hard; that was with running down venison, and leaping hedges and ditches after his quarry. Esau wrestled with wild beasts with all his passions, but Jacob wrestled with the angel. Now, let any man among ourselves henceforth pray in his prayers like

Jacob and Elijah: let any man among ourselves determine to put his passions into his prayers like Jacob and Elijah, and it will make him a new man. His heart, and all the passions of his heart, will, in that way, more and more be drawn off the things of this life, and will be directed in upon the great world that is within him, and above him, and before him. The heat of his heart will begin to burn after heavenly things. His passions, that have made him so impossible for men to live with, will now all become subdued, and softened, and sweetened till he will be like a little child in your hands. He was at one time so hard, so harsh, so impossible to please, so full of his own opinions and prejudices, so loud, and so forward, and so wilful. But you never hear him now, he so despises himself, and so honours, and respects, and yields up to you. Nothing in the world so renews a man as putting his passions into his prayers. This, in time, will make a saint of the very chief of sinners. This, in time, will turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. O why do we ministers not preach more about prayer, and about the employment of our own and our people's passions in prayer! But if your ministers do not so preach, and do not know the way—you are independent of them. There is a great literature of prayer, and it would splendidly and immediately repay and reward you and your households to have it in your hands every day.

But Elijah would not be the great lesson to us that he is if he were always Elijah, with all his

passions at all times at a flame in his prayers. That no man may glory before God, after all that Elijah has done, we see him before he dies just as weak, and as downcast, and as embittered, and as unhappy as if he had never known how to subdue and subject and sanctify his passions. No. It is no strange thing that is happening to us when we sit under our juniper-bush and say, 'It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.' Elijah was getting old. He was feeling lonely. His work seemed to him to have all come to nothing. Till death was now his only desire, and the grave his true resting-place. All men have their own dejections, and defeats, and despairs. But ministers far more than all other men. Partly from themselves; partly from the peculiar nature of their work; and partly from the deadly opposition to it in the world, and in the hearts of their people. What have I been spending all my life for? an old minister asks himself. Who is any better of all my work? Who is any holier or any happier, or whose house? Who is any less selfish, any less proud, any less worldly-minded, any less envious, any less ill-natured, any less fault-finding, any less evil-spoken? So we despond. So we repine. So we despair. So we sit and say after the triumphs, and the praises, and the hopes of our youth are all past, and our early successes are all over. It is enough. And now, O Lord, take away my life. But it is our pride. It is our self-will. It is our passions coming out of our prayers and coming in between us and our despisers,

opposers, and persecutors. How much better did Samuel behave himself when he was deprived and dismissed and his work all forgotten. Samuel's wisdom and sweetness and absolute heavenly-mindedness never came out more than in his solitary and superseded old age, when he counselled and comforted the people, and said, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will still teach you the good and the right way. In this way Samuel showed Elijah the way to keep his old heart young to the end, and his spirit quiet, and good, and sweet, and beautiful. And it was prayer that did it; and it was putting all his remaining passions still into his prayers to his very end; and it was in that way that Samuel did it, and that Elijah at last learned to do it also.

For Elijah's passions all came back to all their first obedience, and to all their former splendid service, as he stood by Jordan and waited for his signal from the Lord. For, what was the chariot of Israel to Elijah that day, but Elijah's heart already in heaven? And what were those horses of fire that day, but all Elijah's passions all harnessed, in all their heaven-bounding strength, to that heavenly chariot? His faith, his fearlessness, his scorn of evil, his prayerfulness, his devotion to Israel and to God. Those horses of heavenly fire all spurned the earth as they stood and champed by the Jordan. And when the Lord would take up Elijah to Himself, all those horses of fire sprang with one leap up to heaven. And when Elisha saw it he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more.

LVII

ELISHA

LISHA, the servant and the successor of Elijah, was the son of a prosperous farmer in Israel. Shaphat, the father of Elisha, was a man of substance, but, like all true Israelites, rich and poor, he had brought up his son Elisha to a life of hard work. And thus it is that we come upon Elisha standing in the office of superior over his father's ploughmen, while he is, at the same time, one of those same ploughmen himself. One spring day, when all Shaphat's ploughs were at work in the spring-time meadow, and Elisha's plough the foremost among them, Elijah, the old prophet, came up suddenly behind Elisha and cast his rough mantle over Elisha's shoulder. In a moment the young ploughman saw and understood what it was that had happened to him. Elijah had not spoken a single word to Elisha. But Elijah's solemn silent act was sufficiently clear and eloquent to Elisha. 'When a great teacher dies,' says Sir John Malcolm in his *History of Persia*, 'he bequeaths his patched mantle to the disciple that he most esteems. And the moment the elect

disciple puts on the holy mantle he is vested with the whole power and sanctity of his predecessor. The mantles which were used by ascetics and saints have always been the objects of religious veneration in the East. The holy man's power is founded upon his sacred character, and that rests upon his poverty and contempt of worldly goods. His mantle is his all, and its transfer marks out his heir. Some of these sacred mantles can be traced for several centuries, and their value increases with their age.' This is an old and superstitious tradition now; but in the ploughed field of Abel-Meholah we are back at its very beginning and first performance, when Elijah comes up behind Elisha and casts his cloak of camel's hair over the shoulders of Shaphat's son. And, as if to make it impossible for himself ever to turn back from following Elijah, Elisha made a fire of the wood of his familiar plough, and slew his favourite oxen and made a feast of the flesh, and thereby proclaimed openly to all men that he had put his hand to another plough than that plough of wood, from which he would never draw back. Elisha burned his ships that day, as the Romans would have said. Shaphat, Elisha's father, was growing old, and Elisha would soon have inherited the rich meadow he was then working in; but, in a moment, all that was for ever changed; and Shaphat may now cast his husbandman's mantle over what young farmer he will; his son Elisha is henceforth dead to all that Abel-Meholah has to hold out to him. For the next fifty years Elisha is to be a spiritual

ploughman in the Lord's meadows, which are the hearts and lives of the men of Israel.

Elijah's mantle is one of our most expressive proverbs, and so is Elisha's request for a double portion of his departing master's spirit. 'Ask what I shall do for thee,' said Elijah, 'before I be taken away from thee.' And Elisha said, 'I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.' Not the double of all the gifts and all the graces that Elijah had possessed and had so well employed. That is an impossible explanation of Elisha's petition. I can easily imagine Elijah feeling now that life was over with him, that he had been an unprofitable servant. All true men so feel. I can easily imagine Elijah seeking of God in prayer that his successor should be twofold, should be tenfold, more gifted and more successful than he had been. But I cannot imagine a humble and loyal soul like Elisha so insulting his master on his deathbed as to say to him: 'I hope to have double thy success to show when I come to die.' No; the thing is inconceivable. What Elisha really asked for was simply the fulfilment of what had been already promised him when Elijah's mantle fell on his shoulders. That act of Elijah was the sign and the seal of Elisha's adoption. And the adopted son had always allotted to him the double portion that belonged to the first-born. Not the double of what the adopting father possessed himself; for no man can put into his testament the double of what he has of his own. But he can double the portion that would properly

have belonged to one of his younger children. And thus it is that, when it is put to him, Elisha simply, and dutifully, and humbly asks that the divine law of adoption and primogeniture may immediately begin to hold and to take effect in his spiritual sonship to the departing prophet.

The world and the church live and thrive and grow from generation to generation under the guiding and upholding hand of God. All the time that Elijah was repining and meditating death under the juniper tree, God was preparing the young ploughman of Abel-Meholah to wear Elijah's mantle, and to carry forward Elijah's work. And when we are prognosticating the headlessness and the collapse of the church when this man and that man shall have fallen asleep, all the time God has His hidden servants, quite well known to Him, and quite ready to take up this man's and that man's great office when they shall demit it. There may be to be seen following the spring plough in Strathmore or in the Lothians at this moment, some young man who shall be as well known and as great in a few years in Scotland as Elisha was in Israel. There are certainly at school, at college, in the shop, in the office, on the hills, in the mine, young men who, five-and-twenty years after this, shall be as great preachers, as great writers, as great statesmen, as great administrators, and as great discoverers as any of those who are now in such fame, and far better suited for the time to come. Elisha was not Elijah. But he was the gift of the living God to the living Israel of his

day. And I would have you all keep your dejected hearts in perfect peace, sure of this, that God will look after both the church and the world far better than the most anxious-minded and censorious-minded of His people.

And let all our prophets, and all the sons of our prophets, go to school in manners and in morals to those fifty sons of the prophets in that day in Israel. Look at them as they hail and bow down before a better man than themselves, though he is as young as themselves, and withal, has not had their schooling for his office. There is blessing in store for Israel, from such young ministers. Elisha had been a ploughman till he became Elijah's servant. And, yet, in a moment, and without a murmur, the fifty sons of the prophets at once accept Elisha as the true successor of Elijah, and as their young master. The old men who had not had great success themselves did not cast up Elisha's youth to him when his success began, nor did the sons of the prophets keep up against him his humble origin, or his lack of letters. There must have been good Divinity Halls in those days when there were fifty probationers just come out of them of such humility, and admiration, and belief in better men than themselves. These prophetic graces are beautiful to us to read about at a distance, but they are far more beautiful to God when they are seen in everyday men like ourselves. Those fifty students must have had good tutors and governors in ministerial morals and in pastoral theology.

About dead men's mantles. Elisha's first instinct

was to bury and blot himself out under Elijah's coat of camel's hair and his leathern girdle. And he did actually begin his public life wearing those ancient coverings and austere accoutrements. But Elisha was far too simple and far too sincere a man to continue long wound up in such ceremonies. He set out, and I do not wonder at it, in Elijah's mantle, and he did his first prophetic work in it; but he wore it awkwardly, and he soon laid it aside. Elisha was an altogether smaller and more homely man than Elijah, and he wisely preferred before long to put on much less startling and outstanding clothes. Elisha was a gentle, homely, kindly low-land minister; as unlike Elijah as the green meadows of Abel-Meholah were unlike the savage solitudes of mountainous Gilead. And we must not demand of our young preachers that they shall all stride out with the same step, and pronounce just with the same accent as the Elijah of our youth. We had Elijah, and he fulfilled his day, and did his work. And no men among us need more to be men of to-day, and not of yesterday, than they who preach the Word of God to us and to our children. Even the Elijah you so often go back upon, were he here again, he would not be exactly the same man, with exactly the same mantle, the hem and the hair of which you were so wont to kiss.

Every ill-brought-up boy who calls names at old people and at odd people must be reminded of those miserable boys and girls of Bethel who called bad names at Elisha till two she-bears came out of the

wood, and tore forty and two children of them. The Areopagus on one occasion sentenced a Greek boy to death only for plucking out a quail's eyes, because, they said, if that boy was let live, he would do widespread cruelty and mischief when he grew up, and he had better die at once; and so they sent him to the executioner. On December the 21st, 1719, Thomas Boston writes this in his journal: A poor boy came into the house begging, having such a defect in his speech that he pronounced the words father and mother *fao* and *moa*, at which my wife and others smiling, desired him to speak over again what he had said. In the meantime my little daughter stood looking on with tears in her eyes and in great distress, and at length she came up to her mother, and said, 'Mother, did God make that laddie?' 'Yes, my dear, He did.' 'Will He not then be angry at us all for laughing at the laddie, for my lesson says, "He that mocketh at the poor, reproacheth his Maker"?' She was in mighty concern also to let the boy have some old clothes.

With all that the sacred writer has given us about Elisha, I am not satisfied. I would have liked some more about Elisha's father and mother. I always regret hearing Elisha calling Elijah his father, and no more word of honest Shaphat. Fathers, come with me, and let no man run away with our best name from us! Let no man, no, not Elijah himself, take our crown. Let us determine to be the fathers of our children in the spirit also. Let us be specially jealous of our best ministers,

lest our children pass us by, and claim any other man whatsoever as their spiritual father. Let our children be able all their days to say—it was my father; it was my mother. We feed them, we clothe them, we send them to school, and we work and lay up for them. O let no other man, the very best, cast the mantle of the Christian calling and the Christian spirit on the shoulders of our children. Let us do that ourselves; let us do it early; let us do it now. Here am I and the children which Thou hast given me !

LVIII

NAAMAN



THE instructive story of Naaman is known to all. His valiantness in battle, his greatness with his master, and the high honour in which he was held among his own people; and, with all that, his incurable leprosy—in two or three of his most eloquent strokes the sacred writer sets Naaman most impressively and most memorably before our eyes. The little captive maid also who whispered to Naaman's wife, 'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.' And, then, how Naaman came to Samaria with his horses and his chariot; how Elisha sent out and told him to go and wash seven times in Jordan; how Naaman was wroth and would not wash in Jordan, but went away home in a rage: how his excellent servants reasoned with their angry master and how he repented and went and washed in Jordan till his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child—all that is told in fourteen as solid and as eloquent verses as ever were written. They have a miraculous talent of style, those Old Testa-

ment authors. Our very best authors cannot hold the candle to them. And those who are counted worthy to stand second to those Old Testament artists have come to their skill by reading nothing else but their Bible day and night. But we have opened our Bible this night—not to study the excellent art of writing, excellent art as it is; but to seek in our Bible the salvation of our souls; without which salvation, all our writing, and all our reading, and every other art and science of human life, is but whitewashing a sepulchre, which all the time is full within of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

With all his valiantness, and with all his honours, Naaman was nothing better all the while than a dead man. For Naaman was a leper. Naaman had all that heart of man could wish; but, what of that, when he was what he was? Leprosy was feared and fled from in Israel as the stroke of God. Leprosy was the most fearful and the most hateful disease known to man. Leprosy was so loathsome, and so utterly incurable and deadly, that it was not looked on as an ordinary disease at all: but, rather, as a special creation in His anger, and a direct curse of God, both to punish sin, and, at the same time, to teach His people something of what an accursed thing sin really is; till the whole nature of leprosy and all the laws laid down for its treatment, and the miraculous nature of its so seldom cure, all combined to work into the imagination, and into the conscience, and into the heart, and into the

ritual, and into the literature of Israel, some of her deepest lessons about the terrible nature and the only proper treatment of sin.

For sin is like leprosy in this, that it is the most mysterious, stroke-like, malignant, loathsome, and mockingly incurable of all our incurable ills. Sin is like Naaman's leprosy in this also, that a man is great with men, and honourable, and a mighty deliverer—but all the time he is a sinner. And all a sinner's life, and all his greatness, and all his honour, and all his praise is but dressing a dead body with rich ornaments, and sprinkling a sepulchre with sweet smells. It needed no divine grace in Naaman to teach him that he was a leper. Day and night; in the council-chamber and in the field; eating and drinking; waking and sleeping, Naaman was a leper. But it needs a wisdom, and a truth, and an experience, and a stage of salvation that few men have attained to, before a sinner knows that he is a sinner; really and truly knows it, as Naaman knew his leprosy. Some men do: one here and another there. If you have made the discovery that you are a leprous sinner: if you have found no figure that so well describes you as Naaman's leprosy,—then you have made the greatest discovery a man can make in this world. 'What was your greatest discovery, Sir James?' asked an interviewer of the discoverer of chloroform. 'That I am a sinner,' answered the saintly man, 'and that Jesus Christ is my Saviour.' Yes, that was out of all sight Sir James's greatest and most fruitful discovery, for that made

him a great man with his Master; and it made him full of love and honour among all the best people in the land. You will not yet believe it, but you also begin to belong to the race of the greatest men that have ever lived when you begin to make the deadly discovery that you are a leper at heart. Nay; not only is that the beginning of all your true greatness; but your knowledge of sin all along to the end of life—that is the best measure of your true greatness. All our true greatness has been lost to us through sin; and it is in sin, and through sin, and by escaping out of sin, that we shall not only recover all our lost greatness but shall attain to a far greater greatness than that we had lost. I do not care a straw to go to see the greatest scholar, or the greatest author, or the greatest preacher, or the greatest soldier, or the greatest statesman. But I would go a long way to see the greatest sinner; to see and to converse with that man still on this earth who has the deepest knowledge of his own heart. The man who has made that discovery, and who is daily and hourly making that discovery, and who is every hour of every day acting before God and man on that discovery—that is the man of all men to me. The fifty-first Psalm is David's masterpiece to me. Isaiah's greatest chapters to me are his fifth and his fifty-third. Paul's greatest passage is his immortal morsel of autobiography in the seventh of the Romans. Augustine's best book is his *Confessions* and John Bunyan's his *Grace Abounding*, and Jacob Behmen's his *Way to Christ*. 'Sin?'

exclaims even our own Carlyle in indignation; 'the deadliest sin of all is to be conscious of no sin.' And so it is.

But, leprosy and all, Naaman was still a very proud man; for all the leprosy in the world will not make a proud man meek and lowly in heart. When Naaman was told how he could be made clean, because the prophet's counsel did not fit in with Naaman's prejudices and his sense of his own importance, he was wroth at Elisha, and went home, leprosy and all, in a rage. 'Behold, I thought, he will surely come out, and stand, and will call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.' And there are men among ourselves who go home in the same rage as often as they are told their deadly disease and the only way of recovery from it. With all your prepossessions and prejudices, many of you must know that you are not one step nearer anything that could be called salvation than ever you were. There is as much leprosy in your heart to-night as ever there was. And in your best moments you would give ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment to be for ever rid of it. What do you say just to give a trial to the things that hitherto have most angered you to hear them spoken about? The real spiritual nature of salvation has always been an unwelcome subject to you. Preaching you greatly enjoy, and you are a great judge of it. Naaman went to the prophet's house to tell him how to preach, and because the prophet did not

take his lesson from Naaman, Naaman went home in a rage. My brethren, salvation is not cut to your pattern. Leprosy is not cured on your prescription; its true and only cure has laws, and rules, and obediences, and submissions, and sacrifices of its own that may all anger you to be told them, but it can be had in no other way. What do you say to humble yourself for once, and to try the thing that has hitherto most exasperated you to be tied down to it? All the chances are that your salvation lies out in the direction of far more secret prayer, far more self-denial, far less eating and drinking, far less talking, and far more submission of your opinions and habits of life to other men. It may lie in putting away all your present reading, and giving up much more of your time and attention to books that treat of the soul, its diseases, its discipline, and its salvation. I advise you to get over your temper, and to try that very way that you have up till now been so hot and so loud against. It will humble you to do it, and you are not a humble man; but if you ever come back from Jordan with your flesh like the flesh of a little child, you will be the foremost to confess that you had almost been lost through your pride, and your prejudice, and your ill-nature.

What a fool that man Naaman must have been! everybody has exclaimed over his history ever since his day. He did not deserve to be healed! Surely he was not so ill after all! Either he had not much leprosy upon him, or else he was a perfect madman to do as he did. Yes; but madman with

pride, and self-importance, and self-will as he was, Naaman will stand up in the day of judgment and will condemn some of us who have his history before us; for, like him at one time, we do not even yet feel the full curse and deadliness of our sin, else we would do very differently with it. Other men who see what the things are that stand between us and the salvation of our souls are astounded at us. Naaman's very heathen servants were astounded at him, till they broke through all their fear of him and told him so. We sell our souls every day for such contemptible things; such a small outlay would buy us eternal life. Jacob bought his birth-right by denying himself just a single mess of pottage. And all that stood between Naaman and perfect health and long life was just to ascend his chariot, and let himself be driven to Jordan, when his servants would have undressed him and dipped him seven times; and, ere ever he was aware, he would have come up out of the water as sweet as a child. O son of Naaman, the suicidal leper! Day after day, year after year, you go on selling the health, the strength, the sweetness, and the whole salvation of your soul for a thing that I may not name; it is so impossible to be believed. It is so mad in you, so self-murderous. The devil, who so deceives you, laughs before God at the price you put upon the blood of His Son, and upon the grace of His Spirit, and upon your own soul. 'My father,' his servant came near and said to Naaman, 'if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much

rather, then, when he saith to thee: Wash, and be clean?’

But, to speak still more face to face. To put away all types, and figures, and metaphors, however true and terrible. You all know, surely, what the true leprosy is. You all know what the leprosy of your own soul is. It is sin; yes, it is sin. Or, rather, to speak still more true and plain to you, it is yourself. Sin is self. Your true leprosy is yourself. There is no leprosy, there is no sin, but yourself. Get yourself killed in your heart; and God, and love, and heaven, and holiness, and eternal life are all, from that moment, in you. Self is an evil mother big with children ten-fold more the children of hell than herself. And her firstborn is your pride, and your anger, and your envy, and your ill-will, and your hatred of so many men around you. O leper! leper! go out with thy loathsome and deadly heart from among living men. Go to thy charnel-house at once; or else, for thou art still a man, and not yet fully and finally a devil, go wash in Jordan.

Go in God's name. Go in God's strength. Go in God's pity, and patience, and mercy. Go on the spot. Go this moment, and go every day, and every hour of every day, and, blessed be God, every moment, as often as thy self-filled heart again stirs and sins in thee. There is a fountain filled with blood. Filled, that is, with the humiliation, and the obedience, and the submission, and the whole life and death of the Son of God. O son of sin and Satan, O child of wrath, wilt thou not submit

thyself to be saved? Wilt thou not so much as wash thyself? Wilt thou not say there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness like mine? And wilt thou not go down into it continually, saying without ceasing: O Holy God. O pure, and clean, and sweet, and blessed Son of God. Pity a man made of sin. Pity this leper of all lepers. Pity, if Thou hast such pity, the most miserable man on the face of the earth. A man who, as Thou seest, does nothing before Thee but sin. O pity and spare me, my God, for my sin is ever before me. Oh, able to save to the uttermost, wash me, Saviour, or I die! 'How,' asks the disciple in Jacob Behmen's *Supersensual Life*, 'How shall I be able to subsist in all this anxiety and tribulation so as not to lose the eternal peace?' And the Master answers: 'If thou dost once every hour throw thyself by faith beyond all creatures into the abysmal mercy of God, into the sufferings of our Lord, and into the fellowship of His intercession, and yieldest thyself fully and absolutely thereunto, then thou shalt receive grace from above to rule over death and the devil, and to subdue hell and the world under thee. And, then, thou mayest not only endure in all manner of temptation, but be actually the better and the brighter because of all thy temptations.' Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

LIX

JOB



THE greatest of all the men of the East, as Job afterwards became, he began his life with having nothing. In his own lowly-minded words, Job was at one time poor even to nakedness.

When he was at the top of his shining prosperity, and when he suddenly lost it all in one day, his utter desolation threw his mind back on his absolutely destitute youth. The Lord gave, he said, with splendid thankfulness and with splendid submission, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. But, far worse than all his early poverty, and far more difficult to escape and to surmount, were the long-lived sins of his youth. I have been in the same great trespass, says old Bishop Andrewes, from my youth up, and even to this day. Perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil, as Job had now for such a long time been, at the same time he tells us that the heels of his feet still left an accusing and an arresting mark behind him, whatever he did, and wherever he dwelt. Job had been freely and fully forgiven of God, but

vengeance was still being taken of God on all Job's inventions, as God's way has always been with His best saints, and always will be. My sins are ever before me, was Job's continual confession made toward God; while, all the time, he held fast his integrity toward all men, and in the face of all men. To his three friends, who so cruelly accused him of hypocrisy, and who kept insisting that there must be some cloked-up sin in Job's present life that was the cause of all his terrible troubles, he replied with a magnificent and a conclusive vindication of his absolute innocence and perfect integrity. But, all the time, we see Job turning from all men to God and confessing, with the most poignant shame and sorrow, both his past sins and his present sinfulness. 'How many are mine iniquities and my sins! For Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. Thou puttest my feet also into the stocks, and lookest narrowly to all my paths. Thou settest a print on the heels of my feet. If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet Thou wilt plunge me into the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.' The truth is: Job is both guilty and not guilty. Job is both unclean and vile. Job is absolutely innocent of all that Eliphaz and his fellows insinuate and impute to him. The Philistines understand me not, says John Bunyan in his *Grace Abounding*. But Job is not without much sin in his past life, and much sinfulness in his present heart. And it is this—with his unparalleled sufferings, and with

the incessant insinuations and insults of his three friends—it is all this that so racks and tortures Job's tender conscience, and so darkens and crushes his pious heart, and so embitters and exasperates, sometimes almost to rank blasphemy, his far too many defences of himself.

‘How long have I to live?’ said Barzillai to David, when, at his restoration to the throne, David invited the loyal, hospitable, Highland chieftain to a thanksgiving feast in Jerusalem. ‘I am this day fourscore years old. Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?’ And in like manner, when Job's sons and daughters said to their old father, ‘Come to our feasts with us!’ Job answered them thus: ‘No, my children. There is a time for everything. I am no longer young as you are. Rejoice,’ said the genial old man, ‘in the days of your youth. Go your way; eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared.’ Only, all the time, Job had not forgotten his own early days. He knew to his lasting cost that folly is bound up in a young man's heart, and that eating and drinking and dancing, more than anything else, lets all that folly out. And thus it was that Job's sons and daughters had no sooner set out to the days of their feasting and the nights of their dancing, than their father set himself to his days and nights of prayer on behalf of his children. And every morning and every evening till the days of their feasting were all gone about Job never

ceased his sacrifices and intercessions in his children's behalf. For each one of his sons and daughters their old father offered a special sacrifice, and set apart for each a special diet of intercession. So much so, that there is not a father or a mother among us to this day to whom God has not often said, Hast thou, in this matter of thy children, considered my servant Job? No. We confess with pain and shame and guilt concerning our children, that Job here condemns us to our face. But we feel to-night greatly drawn, if it is not too late, to imitate Job henceforth in behalf of our children. We have not wholly neglected them, nor the Great Sacrifice in their behalf. But we have not remembered it and them together at all with that regularity, and point, and perseverance, and watchfulness, that all combined to make Job such a good father to his children, and such a good servant to his God. But if our children are still about us, and if it is not yet too late, we shall vow before God to-night that whilst they are still with us we shall not again so forget them. When they set out to school we shall look out of our windows after them, and we shall imagine and picture to ourselves the life into which they must all enter and cannot escape. We shall remember the streets and the playgrounds of our own schooldays, and the older boys and their conversations. And we shall reflect that the games, and sports, and talks of the playground will bring things out of our children's hearts that we never see nor hear at home. And, then, when they come

the length of taking walking and cycling tours, and fishing and shooting expeditions; and, still more, when they are invited out to eat and to drink and to dance, till they must now have a latch-key of their own—by that time it is more than time we had done with all our own late hours, and had taken ourselves to almost nothing in this world but intercessory prayer. We shall not go with them, but we shall not sleep till they have all come home and shut the door to our hearing behind them. And we shall every such night, and in as many words, plead before God the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for each several one of our own and our neighbours' children. We shall go over their names, one after another. We shall spread out our fears and our hopes before God. We shall go over their ages, their temperaments, their inherited virtues and vices. We shall call up and remember where we were living, and what we were doing at their age; and that will make us fall on our face and plead with God that the heels of our son's feet shall leave no such marks behind them as our feet have left. It had been better they had never been born; it were better they died even now than that they should live to possess the iniquities of their youth, and to be put into those terrible stocks that God still keeps for young sinners. And, then, when they come home late at night, and see his candle still burning in their father's room, without any one pointing it out to them, or casting it up to them, they will understand their father's wistful ways, and that will

bring them to their own knees also for the day past, and for the night past, and for their own souls, and for the souls of their companions. Thus did Job and his sons and his daughters continually.

The curse that always waits in this world on controversy and contradiction has never been clearer seen than it is seen in Job's case. For never was so much shrewd truth, and so many truly pious positions, and so much divine and human eloquence heard on both sides, and from any other five debating men, as was heard all round Job's ash-heap. The authorities on these things tell us that the debating in the Book of Job is the most wonderful piece of genius that has ever been heard or read since debating genius was. And, yet, such is the malignant and incurable curse of all controversy, even at its best, that Job and all his four friends seem sometimes as if they are to be consumed one of another—out of the same mouth so much blessing and so much cursing both proceed. If Job could have but endured to the end the near neighbourhood, and the suspicious looks, and the significant gestures, and the open broadsides of his four friends, 'that daily furnace of men's tongues,' as Augustine has it, Job would have been far too patient and far too perfect for an Old Testament saint. For, till Christ came, no soul was ever made such a battle-ground between heaven and hell, as Job's soul was made. Job's sorrows came not in single spies, but in battalions. Like the Captain of Salvation Himself, Job, His forerunner, took up successful arms against a whole sea of sorrows, and

he would have won every battle of them all had he only been able to bear up under the suspicious looks and the reproving speeches of his four friends. But what Satan could not do with all his Sabeans, and all his Chaldeans, and all his winds from the wilderness to help him, that he soon did with the help of the debating approaches and the controversial assaults of Eliphaz, and Zophar, and Bildad, and Elihu. Oh, the unmitigable curse of controversy! Oh, the detestable passions that corrections and contradictions kindle up to fury in the proud heart of man! Eschew controversy, my brethren, as you would eschew the entrance to hell itself. Let them have it their own way. Let them talk. Let them write. Let them correct you. Let them traduce you. Let them judge and condemn you. Let them slay you. Rather let the truth of God itself suffer, than that love suffer. You have not enough of the divine nature in you to be a controversialist. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not: by whose stripes ye were healed. Heal me, prays Augustine again and again, of this lust of mine of always vindicating myself. Read Santa Teresa's advice about self-excusing.

But, splendid, and, to this day, unapproached composition as the Book of Job is; and, magnificent victory of faith and patience as Job at last achieved; at the same time, the whole tragedy, down to its

completion and coronation, is all displayed on an immensely lower stage of things than are a thousand far greater tragedies at present in progress among ourselves. For, after all, both Job's trials, and his triumphs of faith and patience also, savour somewhat too much of this present world. Job suffers first the loss of his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his camels, and his servants; and then, with that, the loss of his sons and daughters; after which the patriarch is smitten in his own body with such a dreadful disease that he is more like a rotten carcass than a living man. All of which was surely tribulation enough for that day and that dispensation. But the fatal loss and the absolute despair of ever attaining to any true holiness of heart; to any true and spiritual love either to God or man; that is a trial of faith and patience to some men in our day that Job with all his battalions of trials knew nothing about. The Lord chastens some men among us with a heart so full of the blains, and boils, and elephantiasis of spiritual sin that a single day of it would have driven Job downright mad. Under it, in his day, Job would have cursed God, and died. But let those among us who are God's elect to the sanctification of the Spirit take comfort. And let them have patience; ay, and far more patience than all the patience of Job, even as they are called to endure far more than all the accumulated losses and all the intolerable diseases of Job. Let them be absolutely sure that when God has sufficiently tried them, they, too, shall come forth as gold.

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. The time is long ; but the thing is true. Behold, I am vile ; what shall I answer Thee ? I shall lay my hand upon my mouth. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear ; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. It was when Job had been taught of God to see and to say all that, as never before ; it was then that the Lord took pity and turned the captivity of Job. And it will just be when you both see and feel all that ; and that a thousand times clearer and a thousand times keener than Job could either see it or feel it ; it will just be then that the Lord will turn your captivity also till you will be like men that dream. For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me. For the which cause I also suffer these things ; for I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Be ye also patient, and stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

LX

JONAH



THE Prophet Jonah was both the elder son and the unmerciful servant of the Old Testament. He was the elder son. For, as he came nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked him what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in ; therefore, his father came out and entreated him. And the Lord entreated Jonah to leave his withered gourd and his sunbeaten booth, and to come in and share the joy of the spared city. Jonah was the unmerciful servant of that other New Testament parable also. O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me : shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?

Everybody has the Book of Jonah by heart. How the word of the Lord came to Jonah, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me. And

how Jonah fled to Tarshish, and would not go to Nineveh; and how, on going down to Joppa, he found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, to go down to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. The runaway prophet parted with far more than his proper passage-money that day. He paid the advertised fare in the current Joppa coin, with the image and superscription of Jero-boam II. stamped upon it. But no booking-clerk in Joppa could have counted up to Jonah all it would cost him all his future life on earth to have fled to Tarshish from his duty to Nineveh, and from the presence of the Lord his God.

Dr. Pusey tells us that the ships of Tarshish corresponded very much to the great East Indiamen of the days of his youth. And that to 'break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind' was a sailors' proverb for a terrible storm among the seafaring folk of those ancient days. But she would need to be a far more skilfully constructed, and a far more solidly built, and a far more scientifically navigated vessel than even an English East Indiaman that would engage to carry a disobedient prophet away from his post, and to land a guilty sinner in a harbour where God's hand would not hold him. As it was, the ship of Tarshish now in question soon began to give forth signs that she was not chartered to carry to Tarshish such a contraband cargo as that prophet of God was who now lay in her sides fast asleep. For no sooner was she well away to sea than the Lord sent out a mighty wind against that guilty ship,

till every moment it seemed to all on board that she would go to the bottom. You may think the mariners to have been too superstitious, but you must judge gently of a crew of heathen men taken so suddenly between the jaws of death. Come, they said, this is no common storm. Come, therefore, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us. Did you ever hold your breath while God and man were casting the discovering lots of life or death over you? What is thine occupation? And whence comest thou? What is thy country, and of what people art thou? I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Why hast thou done this? And what shall we do unto thee? And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that it is for my sake that this great tempest is come upon you. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging.

Before we leave this remarkably-written chapter of this every way remarkable little book, let me again call your attention to the power and the piety of the Bible style. 'The Lord hurled out,' as old Coverdale excellently translates it, 'a great wind into the sea.' And Jonah himself says, speaking of that sea long after, 'Thou didst cast me into the deep; and all Thy waves and all Thy billows passed over me.' The science of storms was still in its first infancy in Jonah's day; but even if it had already attained a greater maturity and sure-

footedness than it has come to down even to our own day, that would not have debased, or in any way undeified, this sacred writer's so strong and so splendid style. The advance of science does not involve the retreat of religion. Nor does the uniformity and harmony of Nature enable her to dispense with the sleepless oversight of her Creator. The heavens may become still more astronomical than they yet are, without that making them any the less conspicuously the immediate movement of the Divine Hand. And the sea herself will yet be found to ebb and flow, and toss and storm, according to fixed and foreseen laws, without thereby blotting out God's footprints in the deep, or causing any less praise to arise to Him from a smooth sea or any less prayer from a storm. Our meteorology has still a multitude of confused and restless phenomena to register, and a great mass of carefully-taken inductions to reduce to a rule: but, all the time, our Bible keeps impressing upon us that bad weather overtook Jonah for his bad behaviour; and that his disobedience before God had disturbed an equilibrium that was far too delicately poised for any earthly instrument of heat or cold, or dry or moist, to take account of.

That terrible storm arose because of quite open and quite easily ascertainable disturbances in the surrounding and overhanging atmosphere. Yes; most certainly and most indisputably it did. But it also arose,—the less reason does not deny the greater, nor does the proximate cause supersede the ultimate,—it also, and much more, arose, says the

word of God, because there was a controversy being carried on that day between God and His vagabond servant. Saints and sinners, prophets and mariners, are not made for the sake of the sea and the sky, but the sea and the sky are made for the sake of saints and sinners. Seas and skies and storms and fair weather all work together under the most complex and the most majestic laws for our good. Every disobedient sinner suddenly startled out of his sleep at midnight is wiser than all his teachers when he repents, and prays, and vows, and refuses to be comforted by the most correct barometric calculations. There is the making of a rare man of science in that young transgressor who wakens with a start, and cannot sleep for fear as the Great White Throne flashes into his prayerless room, and the last trump makes his sinful bed to shake.

After the terrible tempest, and the still more terrible outcome of the sin-discovering lots, and after his being taken up and cast out by the mariners into the raging sea, and by God into the belly of hell, and after his life was brought up from corruption, and his prayer came into God's holy temple; after all that you would have said that Jonah, so purified in such a furnace, would now be the best prophet that God had ever had. He will be the very best ambassador that could possibly be sent to the king of Nineveh. With a great joy in God Jonah will be an ambassador to beseech the king of Nineveh and all his nobles and all his people to be reconciled to the righteous God of Israel. He had so tasted the bitterness of death in his own

Anglo's vari-
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soul; and, then, after that, he had so tasted that the Lord is gracious—Jonah will preach repentance with a will. Yes. He who had been three days and three nights in such remorse was surely the very preacher to be sent to a people who were, every man of them, within forty days of destruction. Come and see a man who has just come up out of hell, whispered the trembling people of Ravenna to one another, as Dante staggered through their streets. Come, said the men of Nineveh, and hear what the prophet from Israel has to say to our city, for he has just been vomited out of the fish's belly to preach repentance to us, and to our city.

Till the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, and turned every one from his evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands. And till God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way: and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them: and He did it not.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he said, Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. I do well to be angry, even unto death. What ails Jonah? Why is God's prophet in such a passion? Why is it better for Jonah to die than to live? Even Calvin confesses that he suspects some of his own explanations and apologies for Jonah to be but specious pretences, as they are. Jonah would thank no man for his specious apologies for him. Jonah did not write his noble book in an apologetic interest.

He wrote his book in sackcloth and ashes. And, as it was written, so it must be read, if it is not to be read in vain: if it is not to be wholly misread, and its lessons wholly lost.

Biting my truant pen,
Beating myself for spite,
Fool, said my muse to me,
Look in thy heart and write.

Don't repent of penning

Jonah was exceedingly displeased, and he was very angry at the repentance and deliverance of Nineveh, because, like all his people in the house of Israel, he both feared and hated Nineveh with his whole soul. Nineveh, as Jonah knew, was predestinated and prepared, and prophesied of God to be the fast-coming scourge and the cruel prison-house of the conquered and captive Israel. And, such was the power and the policy of Nineveh, and such was the sin and the weakness of Israel, that Jonah could look for not one atom of hope for his country unless it was in the great and insufferable wickedness of Nineveh, and in the swift and sure judgment of God against Nineveh. And thus it was that every report that came across the wilderness of the increasing wickedness of Nineveh, Jonah rejoiced in that, and took comfort out of that both for himself and for his people. It was the best thing that could happen to Jonah when the word of the Lord came to him and said, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me. Jonah's heart beat high with hope that Nineveh was now so near her destruction. And if only all possibility of her repentance and

reformation could be kept back from Nineveh for forty days, then all might yet be well with Jonah and with his foredoomed people. But, with such a God as his God was, Jonah had no security. With a God so given to mercy at the first sign of repentance in a sinner, Jonah felt that Israel was not safe till Nineveh was completely destroyed, and for ever blotted out. If I go and preach that preaching to them; if I go and warn and alarm them; and if they repent and turn them to God; then it were better I were dead. Perish my prophet's place: perish the presence of God and all, rather than that I should take a single step to preach repentance to Nineveh! And Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, with the result that all the world knows. And, then, when he was shut up to choose between preaching in Nineveh, or making his bed in the belly of hell; and, then, when his compulsory preaching ended as he felt sure it would end—it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 'Were it known to us,' says Dr. Pusey, 'that some European or Asiatic people were to carry our own people captive out of our land, more than would be willing to confess it of themselves, would still inwardly rejoice that such a calamity as the earthquake of Lisbon befell the capital of that people.' Ay, and far short of our captivity, let any Continental people, by the education and the industry of their workmen, threaten to take away some of our foreign markets from us, and what an outburst of scorn and indignation will immediately sweep over

Jonah
his
sailor
priest

our land. What is that upstart Germany that she should make better merchandise and sell it cheaper than England! What is that volatile France that she should with such insistence demand what we intend to do in Egypt! And what is our secular rival Russia that she should seek an outlet to any ocean east or west! Does Britannia not rule the waves by Divine right and by her ironclad fleet! Let England expand and increase, and let all the other nations of the earth keep silence. It displeased Jonah exceedingly that the Lord had not destroyed Nineveh, and he was very angry. And not only between contending and competing nations, but much more so between contending and competing churches. With what Jonah-like displeasure do we Free Churchmen and Dissenters hear that an Established Church is prospering, and with what a like uneasiness do State Churchmen read that our Sustentation Funds stand firm. We hear much worse news than that a certain church is likely to have to withdraw from some of her mission-fields because her people will not support her work. We are not overwhelmed with sadness when we read of a morning how her greatest orators drew but a thin house on that subject last night. Better the heathen perish than that such prosperity should attend the labours of our rival. Better that the whole city lapsed than that her communion-roll should so run over. How angry Jonah is still made—he never forgives you—if you have any good to say of any other church than his own, or of any party in his own church than his own

party. Till you come down to this,—if you have any good to say of any man but himself. Poor Jonah! who had to make his choice between the belly of hell and the possible repentance, and preservation, and prosperity of Nineveh. But far poorer, and far more to be both blamed and pitied, you and I who have to make our choice between that same arrest and imprisonment and a life of service and of continual prayer and good-will for all our enemies. Behold, I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation!

John Calvin is certainly correct when he says that Jonah had far more respect to his own reputation as a prophet of the divine judgment to Nineveh than he had either to the good of Nineveh or to the glory of God. And we are all like Jonah in that respect. Our reputation is our first and our chief regard in all that we do. At any rate, when I watch the working of my own heart in this matter, and then write honestly out of my own heart, this is what I am compelled to write: I am Jonah. In the matter of my own reputation as a preacher, that is. For I used to say, Let me die first before I am eclipsed by another in my pulpit, and among my people. I fought with a Jonah-like fierceness against the remotest thought of my reputation ever passing over, in my day at any rate, to another. I kept my eyes shut to the decay going on around my pulpit till I could shut my eyes to it no longer. And then, when the proper cure came for that

decay, how unwelcome at heart all the time that cure was to me. Jonah was exceedingly displeased at the success of his mission to Nineveh, and I myself have taken a part in missions in my ministry also, the success of which sometimes makes me sick at heart. 'I beseech Thee now, O God'—they are Augustine's words—'to reveal me to myself still more than Thou hast yet done; so that I may confess myself to my brethren, who have promised to pray for me.' 'And those things, my brethren'—they are Paul's words—'I have in a figure transferred to myself for your sakes, that ye might learn in me not to think of men above that which is written. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised'—and deserve to be.

But Jonah came to himself again during those five-and-twenty days or so, from the east gate of Nineveh back to Gath-hepher, his father's house. 'He travels the fastest who travels alone.' Week after week, Sabbath day after Sabbath day, alone with God and his own thoughts in that sacred wilderness made Jonah another man. So much so, that by the time that Jonah crossed the Jabbok, and spent the night at Peniel, Jonah was prepared not only to go to whatever work God sent him, but far more than that, and far better than that, Jonah was now prepared to pay his vow, and to write his book, and to say in every humiliating chapter of it—Come and hear, all ye that fear God; I will declare what He hath done for my soul. And, long

before the first day of atonement after his flight to Tarshish came round, Jonah had his autobiography ready to bind it with cords to the horns of the altar. And thus it is that we have now lying open before us to this day the very identical psalm that Jonah sang every new morning on his way home from Nineveh to the land of Israel. And a splendid and a fruitful psalm it is for the use of all redeemed and restored sinners, and especially for the use of all redeemed and restored ministers of such sinners. I cried by reason of mine affliction to the Lord, and He heard me. Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest me. I am cast out of Thy sight, yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever; yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. They that observe lying vanities—their own reputation, that is—forsake their own mercy. But I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

LXI

ISAIAH

T was the day of atonement in the Temple. And a sadder day of atonement had never dawned on Jerusalem. For King Uzziah, one of the best kings Jerusalem had ever seen, had been struck of the Lord with leprosy but yesterday. For fifty years Uzziah had reigned in Jerusalem, and had done judgment and justice till he was accepted of his people as almost the promised Messiah Himself. But his great services, and his great successes, and his great honours had all exalted and intoxicated Uzziah's heart till he fell in his old age into what was the unpardonable sin of the Old Testament. And thus it was that on that atonement day he lay in a lazaret-house waiting for his death and burial, a castaway from before both God and man. And thus it was that all Judah and Jerusalem were afflicting their souls that day because of the fall of their aged king, and because of his hopeless leprosy. And thus it was that Isaiah also, the son of Amoz, came up to the Temple that day clothed with sackcloth, and with

ashes upon his head, and with the leper's rag upon his upper lip. You speak of your preachers, and you praise their power of imagination, and their eloquence, and their dramatic passion, and the way they sink and lose themselves in their work. But if you had lived in Israel in those days you would have seen imagination, and eloquence, and dramatic passion, and all else to astonish you. You would have seen Elijah running with girded-up loins before Ahab's chariot from Mount Carmel to the entrance of Jezreel, while the little cloud like a man's hand made the heavens black with wind and with a great rain. And then you would have seen the same prophet in his old age casting his mantle in silence on the shoulders of Elisha the son of Shaphat, as he ploughed in his father's field with the twelfth yoke of oxen. At another time, you would have seen the prophet Jeremiah hiding his girdle in the hole of a rock of Euphrates till it was marred so that it was profitable for nothing. Again, you would have seen the same sad prophet preparing a prophecy as he stood in the potter's house while the potter wrought a work on the wheels. Again, the same prophet at another time took a potter's earthen bottle, and taking with him of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests, he brake the bottle in the valley of Hinnom and said, This will I do to Jerusalem, saith the Lord. At another time Jeremiah made him bonds and yokes upon his neck, and even went up into his pulpit with the bonds and the yokes upon his neck. At another

time he buys a field in Anathoth and weighs the money, and subscribes the evidence, and takes witnesses, and seals the purchase according to law and custom, and then takes that field in Anathoth for his text. And, then, toward the end of his ministry, this same prophet wrote in a book all he had ever said about Babylon, and bound a stone to the book, and cast it into the river Euphrates, and said, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again from the evil that the Lord shall bring upon her. And you would have seen Ezekiel actually lying on his right side for three hundred and ninety days, while he ate his bread off the dunghill, and thus preached the hardness of the famine that the Lord would send upon his people for their sin. And again we read in Ezekiel: I did so as I was commanded; I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with my hands; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bore it upon my shoulder in their sight. And, in like manner, with all the passion and sin and shame of the future foremost prophet of God, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, put the leper's filthy rag upon his lip, and took up all Uzziah's sin and misery upon his heart, and went and stood beside the altar that day of atonement in the Temple. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the

tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I: send me. And thus it was that that day of atonement for King Uzziah's leprosy was the day of Isaiah's call to be the prophet of the Lord to the leprous people of Jerusalem. The son of Amoz 'offered himself to great inspiration by means of great humiliation,' as Pascal so often repeats it, and so delights to repeat it.

'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' Why does the Lord ask that question with such anxiety when He has all these shining seraphs standing at His side, and each one of them with six wings? Why was Isaiah, the son of Amoz, a man of such unclean lips, and a man so woful and undone, so accepted, and so sent? Seraphs, not sinners, should surely be the preachers of such holiness as that of the God of Israel, and the heralds of such a Saviour—that is what we would have expected. But God's thoughts in these things are not as our thoughts. It was not a seraph burning with heavenly love that was sent to preach to Jerusalem in Uzziah's day, but a young man who but a moment before had been full of leprosy to his lips, and laden to the earth with his own and his people's sin. It was Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who took boldness to say, Here am I, send me. And it was to that same Isaiah that the Lord said, Go and tell this people. And this has always been God's way

in choosing and in ordaining and in sending both prophets, and psalmists, and priests, and preachers for His Church on earth. Only once did God choose a completely sinless preacher. Always, but that once, God has chosen sinful men; and, not seldom, the most sinful of men He could get to speak to their fellow-men about sin and salvation.

Gabriel might come with his six wings to announce to Mary that the fulness of time had come and that the Word was to be made flesh, but it was John, who was less than the least in the kingdom of heaven, who was sent to preach repentance to the vipers of his day, and to urge them to flee from the wrath to come. And, just as for the awakening and the warning of sinners, so for the edification and the comfort of saints. 'For every high priest is taken from among men, who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.' Isaiah, accordingly, of all men on the face of the earth at that moment, and of all angels in heaven, was the man chosen of God to preach repentance to Jerusalem, and to prophesy to her, as never before, the coming of her Messiah. And he preached on all these matters as no angel in all heaven could have preached. He preached as only a leper could preach to his brother lepers, and as only one undone man could preach to other undone men. Just hear him in his first sermon. 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. Ah! sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers. Why should ye

be stricken any more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.' All God's seraphs taken together could not preach like that. It takes a great sinner to preach as well as to hear like that. You must call, and ordain, and inspire a leper if you would have passion in your pulpits like that. And you must be lepers yourselves to put up with passion in your pulpits like that. You cannot have preaching like that from your commonplace men, and from your commonplace sinners. You must have a man of men to see, and to feel, and to say things like that. And then, on the other hand, no seraph of them all, with all his eyes and with all his wings, had seen down so deep, and had come up so close to the holiness of God as Isaiah had seen and had come close. The seraphs cry Holy, Holy, Holy, to one another, but they do not know what they are saying. The seraphs are innocent children. And He whom they so innocently praise charges His seraphs with folly. But, 'Woe is me! for I am undone!' The Lord likes to hear that. He takes great pleasure in that. He bows down from His high throne at the sound of that. He sees what pleases Him in every syllable of that. With that young man will I dwell, He says to Himself, as He sees and hears Isaiah on that day of atonement. This young preacher, then, having seen both sin and holiness as no seraph ever saw these terrible things, proceeds in his sermon in this way: 'Wash you, make you clean; cease to do

evil, learn to do well; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' Every syllable of all that is out of Isaiah's own experience. Preaching like that never yet came out of the schools of the prophets, any more than it ever came out of the mouth of an angel. Isaiah had done it all to himself, and had had it all done to him of God. From unclean, he had washed him and made himself clean. From doing evil, he had put away the evil of his doings from before God's eyes. He had judged the fatherless, and he had pleaded for the widow. We hear him doing all that in tremendous words in this very sermon. And then the Lord had commanded His most evangelical seraph to take a live coal with the tongs from off the altar till Isaiah's iniquity was taken away and his sins purged, and till all Jerusalem knew that a prophet of the Lord had arisen among them.

Saint Jerome called Isaiah the evangelical prophet, and it was a very happy hit of the great translator. But we are entangled with a whole net-work of questions about the evangelical prophet that had not yet arisen in men's minds in Jerome's day. Are there *two* Isaiahs bound up together in this great evangelical book? Or is it the same son of Amoz we have here from the first chapter to the last? I do not know. I am like Mr. Spurgeon: my heart leans to one Isaiah, but the facts must be heard. And I shall resist to the

death every attempt to keep the facts from being heard by those who are able to hear them. But I shall also claim for them and for myself that the common people shall be allowed to come to church to worship God without being teased and tormented about the age and authorship of this and that chapter of Holy Scripture. I shall take it for granted to-night, therefore, that the name of the son of Amoz may, with the utmost confidence and the very best propriety, be used here of the whole of his sixty-six bold and eloquent chapters. I shall always say 'Isaiah' here, just as the New Testament, and Jerome, and the universal Church of Christ has said 'Isaiah' about this book from the beginning down to our own day.

The now well-known name that Jerome first gave to Isaiah out of his cave at Bethlehem is a great name. There is no greater name that Old Testament prophet or New Testament preacher can bear. You will all think that you know quite well already how great a name Jerome's name to Isaiah was. But there is nothing that we know less than just those things that we think we know so well that we do not need to know any more about them. Feeling very sure that I did not know all that Jerome meant in his great name that he gave to Isaiah, I took down Dr. Murray's New English Dictionary, and turned to the part containing the word 'evangelical.' All who are able should order Dr. Murray's magnificent dictionary. It is a patriotic act to order it. It is to support the best scholarship of our land and our day to order it.

And it is nothing less than a liberal education to have it delivered every three months at your door. You can have no idea what an ancient, what a noble, what a deeply-rooted, and what a far branching name that was that Jerome gave to Isaiah till you have read through the seven quarto columns that Dr. Murray, with such exact scholarship, and with such exquisite carefulness, gives to it. Beginning with Isaiah, the greatest preachers have all along been evangelical preachers. There is everything in the Evangel of the grace of God and of the work of Christ to make every man who preaches it a great preacher: and, besides the Evangel, there is nothing to inspire, or to uplift, or to empower and embolden any preacher. From Isaiah to Spurgeon the evangelical succession has run on through Paul, and Augustine, and Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and Rutherford, and Baxter, and Bunyan, and Edwards, and Wesley, and Chalmers. And the great doctrines that have made all those great men such great preachers are all what we call the doctrines of grace. They are very bold doctrines; but then, they were all given by divine inspiration to Isaiah and to Paul, and they are all backed up in the preacher of our day by the authority of the Word of God, and by the testimony of the Spirit of God, and by the deepest and best and surest experiences of nineteen centuries both of the best preaching and the holiest life. They are such doctrines as—the image of God in the soul of man; the dreadful depravity and loathsome corruption of the soul of man by reason of original and indwelling

sin ; the spotless heart and life, and the sin-atoning death, of Jesus Christ ; the mission and work of the Holy Ghost in the spiritual enlightenment of the soul, and its new birth to God and holiness ; and the gradual but sure sanctification of the renewed soul to the fulness of eternal life for ever. Isaiah did not preach explicitly, and in as many words, all these evangelical doctrines, but they are all latent and involved in his preaching ; and had he lived in our day he would have preached them all as boldly and as unceasingly as Wesley or Spurgeon preached them. The great evangelical books you all know, by name at least ; the great evangelical hymns we sing in our families and in our own hearts every day ; and the great evangelical hopes form great part of our evangelical preaching to you every Sabbath-day.

John Foster has one of his masterly Essays entitled, 'The Aversion of men of Taste to Evangelical Religion.' It is a piece of such great intellectual power on some of the besetting sins of evangelical preachers that all we who are evangelical preachers, and all you who are evangelical people, should read it till we have all laid it up in our hearts, as our evangelical catechism has it, and have practised it in our lives. John Foster was a preacher himself of such intellectual strength, and depth, and suggestiveness that I should have included his name in my too rapid enumeration of the great names of the evangelical succession. But many great names belong to that shining succession who would not by everybody be included in it

Law for one; Newman, one of Law's spiritual children, for another. I am bold to include Newman, for there is not a bolder sermon on substitution in the English language than Dr. Newman's post-Anglican sermon on 'The Mental Sufferings of our Lord in His Passion.' I was proceeding to say that Isaiah's style, so to call it, is one of the secrets of his so splendid and so abiding power. The Evangel of Salvation was his one goodly pearl, to buy which he had sold all; and then he always set that so goodly pearl in the shining casket of his superb style. 'In every kind of discourse,' says Dante in *The Banquet*, 'the speaker ought to think of what will be sure to charm his hearers'—a rhetorical rule that the eloquent author of the *Divine Comedy* never neglected to observe and obey. 'Because,' he says, 'if a hearer is not well disposed to us our best teaching will be but badly received.' Now, that is what the evangelical prophet always does. He always charms us with the music, and the melody, and the march of his style. Even when his message is the most accusing and condemning; even when there is no beauty in his doctrine that we should desire it, even then we are spell-bound and held to the end in the great preacher's splendid hands. You will not have read or thought much about Isaiah's style. You have other things of more importance, and more worth your time and trouble to read in that prophet and to think about continually. But, for once, you will not grudge to hear a few words on that not irrelevant matter out of one who has given a long and a laborious lifetime

to such subjects. 'Isaiah,' says Ewald, 'is not the especially lyrical prophet, or the especially elegiacal prophet, or the especially oratorical or the hortatory prophet—as we should describe a Joel, a Hosea, a Micah, with whom there is a greater prevalence of some particular colour. But just as the subject requires it, Isaiah has immediately at command every several kind and quality of style, and every several change and variety of delineation. And it is precisely this that, in point of language, establishes the prophet's personal greatness, as well as forms one of his most towering points of intellectual excellence. His discourse varies into every possible complexion: it is tender and stern, it is didactic and threatening; it is mourning and again exulting in divine joy; it is mocking and it is in earnest; but, ever, at the right time, Isaiah's style returns back to its original elevation and repose, and never loses the clear ground-colour of its divine seriousness.'

Yes; Esaias is very bold—

With mouth of gold, and morning in his eyes.

LXII

JEREMIAH

HE most exquisite sensibility of soul was Jeremiah's singular and sovereign distinction above all the other Hebrew prophets. It was Jeremiah's life-long complaint to his mother that she had borne him, a man with such an unearthly sensibility of soul, into a world so out of joint for such souls. Such another child for sensibility of soul was not born of woman until the Virgin Mary brought forth the Man of Sorrows Himself. Those men of Cæsarea Philippi showed their own sensibility of soul when some said John the Baptist ; some, Elias ; but they would have it that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than Hilkiab's son, come back again with his broken heart. Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me the man that I am ! Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.

Jeremiah was far and away the most spiritually-minded of all the prophets. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is

natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. That is to say, it was the inborn, original, and unparalleled sensibility of Jeremiah's mind and heart that the Lord took up and turned to His own service both in the preaching of this prophet and in the production of this book, which stands to this day second only to the Psalms as the most spiritual book in the Old Testament. Some other prophets stand in time and in place nearer to the New Testament; but it is only in time and in place. No prophet of them all stands in reality so near to Jesus Christ. Jeremiah is the true forerunner of our Lord. Even Isaiah himself, evangelical as he is, still retains some of the shadowy and unspiritual elements of that imperfect economy in his prophecy. The restored kingdom of David and Solomon still haunts Isaiah's heart, and it still shapes and colours some of the finest pictures of his imperial imagination. But Jeremiah has nothing of that decayed economy either in himself or in his book. Jeremiah's extraordinary inwardness, and depth, and absolutely pure spirituality, have all combined to deliver both himself and his book from all those apocalyptic, secular, and unspiritual interpretations which have so infested the other prophets. Neither Peter nor the mother of Zebedee's children, could accuse Jeremiah of having misled them in one word of his, in any chapter of his, concerning the coming Kingdom of the Messiah. And more and more as his ministry went on, Jeremiah strove with all his might to draw both the hearts and the imaginations of his

people not only off all alliance with the kingdoms that were around them, but also off the too pictorial Kingdom of the Messiah that had been hung up before them. And, for his pains, Jeremiah was cast into prison again and again, and was maltreated as only the offscourings of the city were maltreated. But his consolation and his hope always lay in that noble doctrine of the Kingdom of God, which he had been honoured to have revealed to him, and which he had preached for forty years at such a price. The depth, the purity, the beauty, the absolute heavenliness of his doctrine were the reward and the joy of his heart, let his fellow-citizens and his fellow-prophets and priests do to him what they pleased. Jeremiah was of all the prophets of the Old Testament the supreme prophet of the human heart. 'The heart is my haunt,' says Wordsworth. And again, 'My theme is no other than the heart of man.' But in an infinitely deeper sense than that, Jeremiah was the prophet of God to the human heart. Jeremiah would have nothing from his hearers and readers but their heart. Let other prophets negotiate and send embassies as they pleased; Jeremiah, in season and out of season, for a long lifetime, laid siege to the hearts of his hearers. The cure of all your famines, he cried, and all your plagues, and all your defeats, and all your captivities—the cause and the cure of them all is in your own heart: in the heart of each inhabitant of Jerusalem and each captive in Babylon. And your prophets who say Peace, peace!—like Law, he called all such preachers

so many dancing-masters; and, like Leighton, he called them so many mountebanks, till they smote him, and imprisoned him in the dungeon, and put his feet in the stocks.

And this is the true way still to preach, even at the same price; if only we had been born of our mothers to preach like Jeremiah. If only we had something of his sensibility, and spirituality, and knowledge of the heart. The salvation of our hearers must always begin with our own salvation: and it must go on to perfection with our perfection. And we cannot be the salvation to any perfection either of ourselves or of our people unless we have a pervading, and prevailing, and increasing sensibility of what salvation is, and what the want of it is. He who has—I will not say a full sensibility of the evil of sin, for he would go mad if he had—but a true beginning of such sensibility, he has the making of a true minister of Jesus Christ in him; otherwise he has not, and should at once go to make his bread in some more lawful calling. ‘They will be thankful for your telling them the particular times when the gospels were writ: for explaining the word Euroclydon, or anathema maranatha; they will be glad of such useless instruction; but if you touch upon such subjects as really concern them in a high degree, such subjects as try the state and way of their lives, these religious people cannot bear to be thus instructed.’ Yes, morning lectures on Euroclydon: evidences of Christianity; defences and debates round and round the subject: whole cart-loads of Bampton, and all like lectures: they are all

so much lost time and strength in the pulpit. They have their place elsewhere, and among those who get any good from them, but they would get all that good, and would not need it any more, if we had taught them some real sensibility for spiritual things. It is Jeremiah's sensibility and spirituality that both preachers and hearers need, and then we would both have the evidence in ourselves. Speak to your hearer's heart and you will soon undermine his head. All his lofty imaginations, with all his high thoughts, will lie all around him as soon as he lies in the dust himself; but not till then, with all your artillery. Young preachers, with your great life still before you, study your own heart day and night. Watch every beat, and flutter, and creep of your own heart day and night. Seek sensibility of heart above all Latin, and Greek, and Hebrew: above all logic, and style, and delivery. Add all these things, and everything else, to sensibility of heart: but one thing is needful if you would not be a castaway in the end. Were you spiritually-sensible preachers you would soon get inside your people's hearts, and you would hold your people's hearts to the end. Deep answers to deep. And if one here and another there should smite you as Pashur smote Jeremiah, say to him, 'The Lord hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib,' and go on with your heart-searching and heart-sanctifying preaching to other people. And your sensibility of heart and mind once well begun will grow till your name is as famous as you could wish it to be where fame and name is alone worth working for. With

ever-increasing sensibility preach every day to them the meekness, and the humility, and the spirituality, and the obedience, and the whole mind of Christ, and you will surely see Christ formed in your people before you are compelled to bequeath your pulpit to your successor. And oh, believe me, the shame and the remorse of having to hand over your pulpit, and you only beginning to preach! And it all lies in a true and a timely sensibility, and in saying, The heart is my haunt, till you know the heart, and can preach to it to some purpose. Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will give you pastors after mine own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Nazianzen says somewhere that Jeremiah was both by nature and by grace the most inclined to pity of all the prophets. Which is just to say over again that he was the most sensitive and the most spiritual. Take natural sensibility and supernatural spirituality together, and you will have the most exquisite sympathy and the most perfect pity possible. There is nothing like the Lamentations of Jeremiah in the whole world again. There has been plenty of sorrow in every age, and in every land; but such another preacher and author as Jeremiah, with such a heart for sorrow, has never again been born. Dante comes next to Jeremiah, and we know that Jeremiah was that great exile's favourite prophet. Both prophet and poet were full to all the height and depth of their great hearts of the most thrilling sensibility; while, at the same time, they were both high towers, and brazen walls,

and iron pillars against all unrighteousness of men. And they were alike in this also, that, just because of their combined strength, and sternness, and sensibility, no man in their day sympathised with them. They made all men's causes of suffering and sorrow their own, till all men hated them, and put a price on their heads. 'There is nothing in all Scripture,' says Isaac Williams, 'so eloquent of love and sorrow and consolation as the 31st and 33rd chapters of Jeremiah. No words can be found in any language of such touching beauty as all that strain.' So surely does natural sensibility, when it is steeped in the Spirit of God, become the most perfect pity and the most exquisite sympathy.

In an unaccountably silly passage in his *Life of Erasmus*, Froude actually prints it that 'Erasmus, like all men of real genius, had a light and elastic nature.' That senseless and impossible passage came back to my mind as I read this melancholy book of this man of real genius. And this also came to my mind out of North's *Plutarch*: 'Aristotle has a place where he says that the wisest men be ever melancholy, as Socrates, Plato, and Hercules were.' And I have read somewhere also on this matter that 'merely to say man is to say melancholy.' I wish it were. At any rate, to say 'man endued by nature with sufficient sensibility, and then by grace with sufficient spiritual sympathy,' is to say the most profoundly melancholy of men. 'O hear me,' says the profoundly intellectual and equally spiritual Jacob Behmen in a comforting passage. 'Hear me, for I know well myself what

melancholy is! I also have lodged all my days in the melancholy inn!’ As Jeremiah lodged also. And how could it have been done otherwise? In such a land: in such a city: among such a people with such a past and with such a present, and doing their best to make their future as bad as their past and their present—it was enough to make the glorified on their thrones melancholy. Jeremiah’s inconsolable melancholy was the mark and the measure of his greatness both as a man and as a prophet. It was a divine melancholy that made his head waters and his eyes a fountain of tears. ‘Tears gain everything,’ says Santa Teresa in her autobiography. No: not everything,—much; but not everything. Tears, when bitter enough, and in secret enough, always gain forgiveness indeed, which is almost everything, and is on the way to everything. But while such tears will always avail under grace to blot out the past, they have no power to bring back the past. Nor do they bring in the sure future so much as one day before its time. All Jeremiah’s tears did not keep back the Chaldeans for a single day’s march. But his tears softened his heart and bowed his head till he was able to go out to meet the Chaldeans, and almost to welcome them to Jerusalem in the name of God. Neither his tears, nor his prayers, nor his resignations, nor his submissions, shortened by a single hour the seventy years’ captivity. But his tears did far better for himself at least. They softened his heart to the very core. They perfected what both nature and grace had so well begun. For they made him not

only an evangelical prophet, but an all but New Testament apostle. Jeremiah's tears were such that they gained the Holy Ghost for him before the Holy Ghost was given, and before Christ was glorified. Till Santa Teresa is amply justified when she says that tears gain everything. And till I am justified in saying that Jeremiah at any rate was not a man of a light and elastic nature.

'Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!' The loneliness of a man's heart among his own people is one of the heaviest crosses that any man has to take up. Jeremiah, to borrow one of his own bitter words, had plenty of 'familiar' among his own people, but he had very few friends. And his familiars watched for his halting and rejoiced over it, and said, Report, said they, and we will report it. Had Jeremiah had a friend among all his familiars, that solitary friend would have proved himself such by refusing to report it. 'He has fallen away to the Chaldeans,' was the report made among his familiars. But Jeremiah had no friend who would take the risk to understand and to defend his friend. And it was among such familiars, and in the lack of such friends, that Jeremiah sighed the sigh that has been taken up and sighed so often since that day: 'O that I might leave my people!' Jeremiah never was a married man. And it was as well that he was not. Men, and especially ministers, of much sensibility, and spirituality, and sympathy, and melancholy are not made to be married. A helpmeet for Jeremiah

was not to be found in all the house of Israel. If his Master had seen it good for His servant to have a wife and children, He would have made Jeremiah's second self, and would have brought her to him till Jeremiah's melancholy would for the time have been somewhat abated. But whether it was that the Lord saw that His servant's sensibility was too exquisite, and his melancholy too extreme, or whatever it was, the Lord said to His servant, 'Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons and daughters in this place.' And thus it was that what a sensitive and melancholy minister takes home and tells only to his wife, when he has a wife who is his friend, and not merely his familiar, all that Jeremiah took and told to God. Till his whole book before us is one long confidence, and conversation, and debate, and remonstrance; and, again, one long submission, and silence, and surrender, and service of God. And till he is home now where all men are friends, and where the familiars of Jerusalem, with their watching and their reporting, do not enter.

And, then, all that made Jeremiah the red-hot preacher that we still feel him to this day to have been. We see with what a fiery sensibility he both prepares and delivers his sermons. At one time we hear him groaning over his text as he stands beside the potter at his wheel, while the potter mars his vessel and casts it away. At another time he does not preach for many weeks. He is away at the Euphrates learning how to illustrate and enforce his next sermon, and he preaches it over and over

to himself as he sees in the sand the footprints of his captive people. Another Sabbath morning he takes his elders out to the valley beyond the city, and dashes an earthen vessel to pieces before their amazed and angry eyes, and that is all the sermon they get that morning. A preacher—like a great preacher of our own land—to ‘terrify even the godly.’ A preacher for his familiars to take him and speak to him. And so they did, and almost succeeded. Pashur, the chief governor, was deputed on one occasion to tame, as we say, Jeremiah’s pulpit. And of such sensibility and melancholy was the prophet at the visit of Pashur that the thing was almost done. Till the prophet appeared all of a sudden with a yoke of wood on his neck in his former pulpit next Sabbath, and with this apology to Pashur, and with this autobiographic introduction to his sermon that day: ‘Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, or speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.’ I suppose every preacher with any fire in his bones has a Pashur or two among his governors. A familiar or two who say among themselves, Report, and we will report it. But I do not read that Jeremiah spake as he was moved by Pashur, the governor. Let Pashur preach himself if Jeremiah has too much sensibility, and spirituality, and sympathy, and melancholy for him. And let Jeremiah go on and preach out all the fire that God has kindled in his prophet’s bones. ‘I could have used a more adorned

style,' says John Bunyan, in his *Grace Abounding*, 'but I dared not. God did not play in tempting me; neither did I play when the pangs of hell gat hold on me. Wherefore I may not play in relating those pangs, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing just as it was.'

Lo ! this man's brow, like to a title-page,
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume.
Thou tremblest, and the whiteness in thy cheek
Is apter than thy tongue to tell thine errand.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias.

LXIII

DANIEL



HERE is always a singular lustre, and nobility, and stately distinction about Daniel. There is a note of birth, and breeding, and aristocracy about Daniel's whole name and character.

There is never at any time anything common or conventional in anything that Daniel says or does. Munro has gathered it all up in these three eloquent words: 'His refinement, his reserve, and the high sculpture of his character.'

The first thing in which Daniel's great qualities all come out is his so wise and so noble self-control and self-denial at the king's table. The narrative is a noble one. 'And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wines which he drank, so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. But Daniel proposed not to defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he

might not defile himself. Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days ; and let them give us pulse to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and as thou then seest deal with thy servants. And at the end of the ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children that did eat of the king's meat.' 'I have remarked,' says an Eastern traveller, 'that their faces are in fact more rosy and smooth than those of others, and that those who fast much, I mean the Armenians and the Greeks, are very beautiful, sparkling with health, and of a clear and lively countenance.' At the same time, Daniel did not at all times and in all places live on bare pulse and water. Calvin says that when Daniel and his three companions got far enough away from the royal table they would both eat flesh with pleasant bread, and would drink wine also in the wayside inns of Babylon, just as they had done when they were at home in Jerusalem. It was the company at the king's table ; it was the idolatry, and the self-indulgence, and the indecency, and the riot among the young men of the palace that made Daniel determine that it would be both far easier and far safer to abstain altogether and from the beginning. When he was far enough away at any time from those snares and temptations and associations, and when he was alone with his three virtuous and temperate companions, Daniel did not make a voluntary and an ostentatious virtue of pulse and water.

A neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
Of Canaan's taste, with wine, whence we shall
rise.

He who of those delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise—

Belteshazzar would say on occasion to Shadrach,
Meshach, and Abed-nego, just as our English
Daniel said in his fine sonnet to

Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son.

At the same time, there was nothing morose or melancholy in Daniel's total abstinence. Daniel was not of a sad countenance over his pulse and water. Daniel did not disfigure his face at the royal feasts. Because of his abstinence Daniel all the more anointed his head and washed his face; till, unless you had watched him well, you would have thought that all that affability, and good humour, and merriment of his must come of the abundance of the king's wine that he drank. Unless you had been in the secret you would never have supposed that Daniel was not eating and drinking with the same self-indulgence as all the rest. In nothing was Daniel's fine character finer seen, not even when his window was set open towards Jerusalem, not even when he stepped down into the den of lions, than it was when he was the last to rise from the royal feasts, with such sweetness, and geniality, and simplicity did he converse with the men of Babylon. Daniel did not expect the young men of Chaldea to deny themselves like

captive Hebrews. They had not either his Hebrew sorrow or his Hebrew hope in their hearts, and he did not look for those things in them. Now it is just here that so many of ourselves both injure ourselves and injure other people by our abstinence. We enter on our abstinence out of some constraint and compulsion. We are abstainers, many of us, against our own hearts ; or, if our hearts are in our abstinence, then it is our hard and self-righteous hearts. We abstain with self-importance, and with self-righteousness, and with sourness and soreness at those who still preserve their liberty. And this makes one man peevish and melancholy in his abstinence, and another man fierce and intolerant. And thus our latter end is worse than our beginning ; and our self-denial than our self-indulgence. We must not only abstain, but we must make our abstinence genial and full of liberty and delight. ‘Furthermore,’ says Plutarch, ‘Alexander was far less given to wine than men would have judged. He was thought to be a far greater bibber than he was because he sat long at the board, but it was rather to talk than to eat and drink. For even when he ate and drank he would propound some new and interesting subject, and yet but when he was at leisure. For, having matters to do, there was neither feast, nor banquet, nor marriage, nor any pastime that could stay him, as they had done other captains. He would ever sup late, and after his long day’s work was done, and he was very curious to see that every man at his board was alike served, and would sit

long at the table, because he ever loved to talk, as we have told you before. And in all other ways he was as gracious a prince and as noble to wait upon, and as pleasant as ever was.' One of Lord Ardmillan's daughters used to say of my dear old friend her father, that 'he breakfasted on the newspapers and dined on conversation.' And so he did; and thus it was that his step was the lightest, and his laugh the merriest, and his heart the most childlike of all the Parliament House men of his day. And in all other ways, like Plutarch's Alexander, Ardmillan was, I think, the most gracious and gentlemanly man I ever knew.

The Chaldean Schools: their literature, their true science and their pseudo-science, their architecture, their music, their political and military methods, their religion and the sacred arts connected with their religion—nothing of all that was at all foreign, or alien, or despicable to Daniel. The captive prince entered into all that with all the zest and with all the labour of what we would call a true student. Daniel foresaw that his whole life would have to be spent in Babylon, and he determined that his exile there should not be so much lost time either to his mind or to his heart. The Chaldean astrology has long since given way before the modern science of astronomy, and with it the so-called Magi, the star-gazers, and the soothsayers, and the sorcerers. But the truly philosophic temper that Daniel exhibited among the wise men of Babylon is still the true and wise temper for us all among the studies and the specu-

lations and the scepticisms of our more learned, more scientific, and more speculative day. Daniel, by God's mercy, possessed the truth that the Chaldeans sought after in sun and moon and stars: in dreams and in incantations. And when he was cast among the speculations and superstitions of Chaldea he was able to study all he saw and all he heard with an interest, with an intelligence, and with a sympathy that are only to be found in a truly religious and a truly cultivated mind. In his birth, in his upbringing, in his breeding, and in his books, Daniel possessed a knowledge of God and of man that no sage of Chaldea could possibly approach: but, at the same time, Daniel was student enough to see that Chaldea had attained to a learning and to a religion of her own that well deserved his best attention. Till Daniel at last came to be acknowledged as more than the equal of the king's most learned and most consulted men. It was the largeness, and the expansiveness, and the hospitality of Daniel's fine mind, all combined with his extraordinary nobility and beauty of character, that gave Daniel such an unparalleled position in the court of Chaldea, and which has gained for Daniel such a famous and such a proverbial name in all subsequent literature. Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet, has heard so much of the wisdom of Daniel, that, to a proud enemy of Israel, he exclaims in irony: 'Thou art wiser than Daniel! We see the popular belief about Daniel strikingly illustrated also in the Apocryphal addition that was made to the Book

of Daniel by its Greek translator and editor, and which was called the story of Susannah and the judgment of Daniel. And we are gratified to read in our own tongue a tribute to the same noble tradition in Shylock's exclamation :—

A Daniel come to judgment ! yea, a Daniel !

O wise young judge, how I do honour thee !

The prophet Daniel became a great proficient both in penitential and in intercessory prayer also as the years went on. And he came to that great proficiency just as a great proficiency is come to in any other science or art: that is to say, by constant, and unremitting, and enterprising practice. Lord, teach us to pray, said a disciple on one occasion to our Lord. But not even our Lord with all His willingness, and with all His ability, can teach any of us off-hand to pray. Every man must teach himself, every day he lives, this most personal, most secret, and most experimental of all the arts. Every man must find out the best ways of prayer for himself. There is no royal road; there is no short or easy road to proficiency in prayer. It is like all the other arts that you have ever mastered; it must be early begun and assiduously practised, else you will be but a bungler at it all your days. You must also have special and extraordinary seasons of prayer, as Daniel had, over and above his daily habit of prayer. Special and extraordinary, original and unparalleled seasons of prayer, when you literally do nothing else day nor night but pray. You

must pray in your very dreams. Till you will come at last to live, and move, and have your whole being in prayer. Now, it is plain that you cannot teach a lifetime of experiment and attainment like that to any chance man: and, especially, you cannot teach it to a man who still detests the very thought of such prayer. It was his yoke in his youth that first taught Daniel to pray. And Babylon taught Daniel and his three friends all to pray, and to pray together in their chambers, as we read. To be arrested in their fathers' houses by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers; to have Babylonian chains put on their hands and their feet: to see the towers of Zion for the last time: to be asked to sing some of the songs of Zion to amuse their masters as they toiled over the Assyrian sands—you would have become experts yourselves in a school of prayer like that. You would have held little prayer-meetings yourselves with your class-fellows and your companions, if you had come through the half that Daniel and his three companions came through. It is because you are not being emptied from vessel to vessel all the week that we never see you at the prayer-meeting. Jeremiah, a great authority on why some men pray, and why other men never pray, has this about you in his book: 'Moab hath been at his ease from his youth up: he hath settled on his lees: he hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel: neither hath he gone into captivity; and, therefore, his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed.'

'Why,' asks Pascal, 'has God established

prayer?’ And the first answer out of the three that Pascal gives to himself is this,—‘To communicate to His creatures the dignity of causality.’ And Daniel was of Pascal’s deep and original mind. For Daniel, just because he read in Jeremiah that deliverance was at the door, all the more set himself to pray as if his prayer was to be the alone and predestinated cause of the coming deliverance. Daniel put on sackcloth, and fasted, and prayed, and went back upon all his own and all his people’s sins in a way that confounds us to our face. We cannot understand Daniel. We are not deep enough. He prayed, and fasted, and returned to an agony of prayer, as if he had never heard of the near deliverance: he prayed in its very presence as if he despaired of ever seeing it. He fasted and prayed as he had not done all those seventy fasting and praying years. Read, all you experts in prayer, with all your mind, and with all your heart, and with all your experience, and with all your imagination this great causality chapter. It is written by a proficient for proficient. It is written by a great saint of God for all such. Read it and think about it. Read it with your Pascal open before you. Read it and sink down into the deep things of God and the soul. Read it and practise it till you know by experiment and by experience that decree, and covenant, and prophecy, and promise, and all, however sure, and however near, are only fulfilled in immediate and dependent answer to penitential and importunate prayer. Read it and pray as never before after the answer has actually

begun. See the answer out to the last syllable before you begin to restrain penitence and prayer. And after the answer is all fulfilled, still read it and the still deeper chapters that follow it, till you learn new fastings, and new sackcloth, and new ashes, and new repentance, away out to your saintliest old age. Read Daniel's greatest prayer and

Know thy dread power—a creature, yet a cause.

LXIV

NEBUCHADNEZZAR



FRANKLY confess myself a convert to Nebuchadnezzar. I frankly acknowledge my great debt to Nebuchadnezzar. I frankly confess that I had wholly misunderstood Nebuchadnezzar, and both the design and the end of God's ways with Nebuchadnezzar. And I would like to share with you to-night the great lesson in humility and in obedience that I have been led to learn out of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was by far the most famous of all the kings of the East. In his early years, and before he came to his great throne, Nebuchadnezzar had won victory after victory over all the surrounding nations. Jerusalem fell before his army after eighteen months' siege, and Tyre, the proudest of ancient cities, succumbed to him after an investiture of thirteen years. The proud position of the king of Babylon among all the kings of that day will best be seen from the words of Daniel who assuredly was no flatterer of great men. 'Thou, O king, art a king of kings, for the God of heaven hath given

thee a kingdom, and strength, and glory. The tree which thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached to heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth: whose leaves were fair and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heavens had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown, and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reached unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.' It could have been no ordinary greatness that drew from a man like Daniel an estimate and an eulogium like that.

But the fame of this magnificent monarch has rested even more on his unparalleled works of peace than on his great successes in war. Great as Nebuchadnezzar was as a warrior, he was still greater as a statesman and an administrator. The vast public works that he planned and executed for his capital and his kingdom in walls and in water-works: in parks and in gardens: in palaces and in temples—all these things, in their vastness, in their usefulness, in their beauty, and in their immense cost make Nebuchadnezzar to stand out absolutely unapproached among the great builder-kings of the ancient East. After we have read all that the historians and the travellers have to tell us about ancient Babylon, no wonder, we say to ourselves, that Nebuchadnezzar's dreams were the dreams of a magnificent imagination. No wonder that his heart swelled within him with pride: and no wonder that it took a stroke such as God

has seldom struck before or since to humble and to abase Nebuchadnezzar, this great king of Babylon. 'This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High: that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass like an ox, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.' All this came to Nebuchadnezzar the king, till at the end of it all he said—'I thought it good to show the signs and wonders the high God hath wrought toward me. Those that walk in pride the King of heaven is able to abase.' Though long dead, King Nebuchadnezzar still speaks in the Book of Daniel, and on a thousand cylinders in the British Museum; and, as on every page of Daniel, so on every brick of Babylon, he that runs may read this evening's text:—'Those that walk in pride the King of heaven is able to abase.'

But Nebuchadnezzar's pride, after all is said, was but the petty pride of a puffed-up and self-important child. If you have eyes in your hearts you will see all Nebuchadnezzar's pride in your own nursery every day. Nebuchadnezzar's bricks were made of clay; whereas the bricks of your nursery-Nebuchadnezzar are made of wood. That, and their ages, is all the difference. Look! your little Nebuchadnezzar cries after you as he pulls your gown, and will not give you peace till you lift up

your hands in wonder over his great Babylon with its wonderful doors, and windows, and bridges, and portcullises. Is not this a great house that I have built? he demands of you. Is my house not far bigger, and far better every way, than my brother's house that he has built? Look, father! Look, mother! Look, nurse! Look, visitor! All wise-hearted mothers see and hear all that with tears behind their eyes, till they are at their wits' end how to deal with their so boastful and so imperious little emperor. The ancient Areopagus sentenced an Athenian boy to death because he had plucked out the eyes of a captive quail. For, said the wise and prescient judges, if that little savage does that to a tame bird when he is still young, what will he not do to the men who are in his power when he is hardened in vice? And they put him to death, and paid no attention to the prayers of his mother. Let all fathers and mothers give their best heed to their little Nebuchadnezzar and to his little Babylon which he has built for the honour of his majesty. This is the beginning. And you know what a great fire sometimes a little spark, if it is let fall and let burn, kindleth. You know the prophetic proverb also about the letting out of water. Let every father, and mother, and nurse, and tutor, and school-master read and lay to heart, as they shall answer for it, William Law's eighteenth chapter, in which he shows 'How the education which men receive in their youth makes the doctrine of humility so difficult to be practised all their after-days.'

But, with all that, I see in my own children every day a far worse kind of pride than any that the big child Nebuchadnezzar shows either in the Book of Daniel, or on the bricks of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar never, that I have read of, got one single lesson from God or man that he did not instantly lay it to heart. As I read of Nebuchadnezzar's humility, and makeableness, and teachableness in Daniel's hands I am amazed at the boldness of the young Belteshazzar, and still more at the behaviour of his mighty master. When I put myself into Nebuchadnezzar's place, when I recall my own temper and my own conduct, I honour Nebuchadnezzar, and I cannot cease from wondering that the king of Babylon has not been far more made of as a pattern of humility and meekness both under the dispensations of God and under the doctrines of Daniel. After his orders had been disobeyed—in his own palace, remember, and at his own table—in the matter of the meat that Daniel and his three companions were to eat, and the wine they were to drink: and after he was compelled publicly to admit that the prince of the eunuchs had acted on far better advice than the king's commandment,—instead of Melzar's head being endangered to the king, Nebuchadnezzar communed with Daniel, and Daniel stood before the king. Then, again, after his great dream, and its interpretation to the destruction of his kingdom, 'King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto

Daniel.' And, then, after his abominably despotic edict about the image of gold in the plain of Dura, and the furnace seven times heated, when the intoxicated king came to himself he said, Lo! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent His angels, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God. And, then, at the end of his life, the king not only let Daniel say this to him, 'Wherefore, O king, break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity,' but he bowed his head and did it. A nobler state paper was never sent out even by the most Christian of kings than is that great document that we have in the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar is another illustration how we go on traditionally calling good men by bad names without looking at what is written out plain before our eyes. I cannot conceive where I got my bad opinion about Nebuchadnezzar. At any rate, I cannot entertain it any longer after I have read that magnificent chapter. I have read nothing nobler about the best kings of Judah, or Israel, or Scotland, or England. I do not know where among them all to look for its equal. But it was not great and

ancient kings, but our own little children I was speaking about; and about our proud-blooded little children inevitably growing up into proud-blooded and bad men. And the hopeless unteachableness of the proud child and the proud man was the all-important point in hand. The proud man holds you henceforth to be his mortal enemy if you tell him the truth as Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, and as Daniel was honoured and rewarded for telling it. Try to teach, try to correct a proud man, and you will not readily do it a second time. It may now be many years since some one found a true and notorious fault with some of us; but we cannot hide from ourselves the state of our heart after all these years at the mere mention of that insolent man's name. But Daniel's counsel was acceptable to Nebuchadnezzar, till that king broke off all the sins and all the iniquities that Daniel so boldly named to him. Can it be said about any of our living preachers of righteousness that his counsels have been acceptable to us, and that we have forgiven and obeyed him to the tranquillity of our conscience to this day?

Rather than bear the pain of truth, fools stray;
The proud will rather lose than ask their way.

It is true Nebuchadnezzar got a tremendous lesson. It was a lesson, as we would have thought, away out of all proportion to the king's transgression. It was one of those tremendous lessons that God only gives to His own sons whom He loves, and whom He is to chasten till they are

made partakers of His holiness. To any man who is not a chastened son and a true saint of God it must look a small sin, if it is a sin at all, for a great king to walk in his own palace and to say to himself the simple truth. For Babylon was undoubtedly great. No greater city has ever been seen on the face of the earth than Babylon. And if Nebuchadnezzar had not built every single street of it, this, at any rate, he could say, that he had found Babylon a city of brick and had made it a city of marble. We hear of baptized kings every day walking in their palaces in Christendom at the end of the nineteenth century, and speaking far more proudly than heathen Nebuchadnezzar spake, and no Daniel dares to stand up and tell them that their feet are partly iron mixed with miry clay. It is as if God had predestinated Nebuchadnezzar to come out of that heathen dispensation, and to sit down in the kingdom of heaven, while the emperors of our modern Christendom are to be cast out. It would look like that; God took such unheard-of vengeance on Nebuchadnezzar's inventions. Did you ever read the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel?—that splendid autobiographic chapter which king Nebuchadnezzar wrote out of his own inkhorn, and gave the document to Daniel to embody in his book? ‘Come, all ye that fear God,’ Nebuchadnezzar begins, ‘and I will tell you what He did for my soul. I have thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God had wrought towards me. For how great are His signs, and how mighty are His wonders! I was

walking proudly in my palace in the kingdom of Babylon, and I said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? And while the word was yet in my mouth, there fell a Voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown as eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes to heaven, and mine understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him who liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say to Him, What doest Thou? Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride

He is able to abase.' Has our own Christendom another royal edict anywhere to show like that chapter? If it has, I do not know where to find it.

To be driven out among the oxen made Nebuchadnezzar a new man. Asaph in Israel also, for his humiliation and his sanctification, was as a beast before God. 'The blessed Behmen, as his disciples all call him, teaches his disciples the same doctrine. 'Listen to my own process,' says that great spiritual genius. 'My soul will sometimes be all of a sudden turned into a wolf within me. Again, I am a dog at home; churlish, snappish, malicious, envious; my heart hides its bone that it cannot eat, lest another dog should get it. Then there is a lion within me; not in his nobility, but in his strong and proud cruelty. At another time, and at the proper provocation, I am a viper, as John preached to his hearers from Jerusalem, venomous, poisonous, and with a stealthy sting. At another time I am loathsome as a toad: at another time timorous as a hare.' Yes; our souls are now this beast within us, and now that,—when the law enters. Only, the law has not entered one in a hundred of us to that depth: and thus it is that we are all still so proud and so disputatious at the hearing of all these things. But when we see and feel ourselves to be oxen in our stupidity, and dogs in our selfishness, and swine in our miryiness, and vipers in our poisonousness—then we have got the key within ourselves to God's great dispensation of humiliation with Nebuchadnezzar. Then we say to Belteshazzar, and to Behmen, Thou art able: and the spirit of

the God of holiness is in thee. And then we leave it like Nebuchadnezzar to be read on our tombstone by all that pass by—

Those that walk in pride He is able to abase.

But Nebuchadnezzar would not have needed to be made to eat grass as an ox if he had early enough and often enough asked Daniel to teach him to pray. Prayer would have done it to Nebuchadnezzar also. Daniel himself was mightily tempted to pride · far more than Nebuchadnezzar ever was with all his wars and with all his palaces. For, was not Nebuchadnezzar, with all his power and with all his pride, prostrate again and again at Daniel's feet? Did not king Nebuchadnezzar fall upon his face, and worship Daniel, and command that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours to Daniel? What could it have been, then, that kept Daniel's heart so sweetly humble through all that, till Daniel was a man greatly beloved of Him who resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble? It was prayer that did it. It was secret prayer that did it. It was his place of secret prayer three times a day every day he lived that did it. Look in at that window in Babylon that stands open toward Jerusalem, and you will see Daniel on his knees and on the palms of his hands till all his comeliness is turned to corruption. It was that that did it. Seneca says somewhere that nothing is bought so dear as that which is bought with prayer—that is to say, you must sell all if you would truly pray. You must begin with selling all your pride, and

everything else as you proceed in prayer, down to your whole soul. I am dust and ashes, said Abraham, not at the beginning, but as he went on in prayer. We are dust and ashes, and far worse than that, says Hooker also, as he went on in prayer. Count the cost, then, before you propose to be a man of prayer. But, then, on the other hand, if any man has come to this, that he would fain, if it were possible, put on humility before both God and man, then let that man pray without ceasing. Enough prayer will work all possible humility into the proudest heart. Prayer every day, and many times every day, and all the day, would bring down and would abase into the very dust very Lucifer himself.

LXV

BELSHAZZAR



NEVER did a military commander attempt a more impossible task than Cyrus attempted when he sat down before Babylon to blockade it. For Babylon was indeed 'Babylon the Great.' Babylon was great in size, in fortified strength, in wide dominion, in wealth, in every kind of resource, and in her proud defiance of all her enemies. But then, to set over against all that, Cyrus was a soldier of the foremost military genius: and, besides that, Almighty God was with Cyrus, and was against Belshazzar.

That was an high day in all the temples and palaces of Babylon. It was the day that Bel had made, and all Babylon was in public worship before Bel their god. And as an evening sacrifice to Bel, a great feast was to be held in Belshazzar's palace that night. But before the sunset, and to prepare his proud heart for his great banquet, Belshazzar rode out in his royal chariot that afternoon on that splendid chariot-drive that his famous father, Nebuchadnezzar, had built round about Babylon. The

wall of Babylon was the wonder of the world. The wall of Babylon reached unto heaven ; and such a mighty rampart was that wall round the city, that no less than four royal chariots were driven abreast on the top of the wall that afternoon, and all in the sight of Cyrus lying below. And as Belshazzar saw Cyrus and his thin red line lying round the mighty fortress, he mocked at Cyrus, and all Belshazzar's princes laughed with him at that spider's thread laid round a sleeping lion. It was a dazzling spectacle at Belshazzar's supper-table that night. All the grandeur, all the wealth, all the princely blood, and all the beauty of Babylon, drank wine at the king's table, and praised the gods of Babylon. When, just as Belshazzar lifted to his lips that cup of the Lord, which had been carried captive out of the temple of Jerusalem, a man's hand suddenly came out and wrote a writing on the wall over against the king's candlestick. But what is that writing on the wall ? Neither the king nor any of his Chaldeans can either read the writing or understand the interpretation thereof. Till Daniel is brought in,—‘ Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another ; yet will I read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. God hath numbered thy kingdom. Thou art weighed in the balances. And thy kingdom is given to the Medes and Persians.’ And while Daniel was yet speaking to Belshazzar, Jehovah was at that same moment saying to Cyrus, ‘ Thou art Mine anointed, and I will loose the loins of kings, and will open

before thee the two-leaved gates. I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. I will say to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up the rivers. I am the Lord, and there is none else.' And Cyrus arose, and lifted up the great sluices that he had made in secret, and the Euphrates flowed away into the new bed that Cyrus had dug for it, till the former bed of the river became the broad and open way by which Cyrus led his men into the revelling city. And that night was Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, slain.

Belshazzar's grave is made,
His kingdom's passed away,
He, in his balance laid,
Is light and worthless clay.
The shroud his robe of state,
His canopy the stone ;
The Mede is at his gate,
The Persian on his throne !

But come back and look at this. Did you ever think of this? How do you account for this? If King Belshazzar does not know what the words are that are written on the wall, why do his knees smite so, the one against the other, and why is his countenance so changed? Is this not a banquet to Bel to-night? And are not all these princes and lords and queens and concubines all Bel's worshippers to-night? Why, then, is Belshazzar in such a terror? Why does he not salute with joy and assurance that divine hand? That must be Bel's hand. Rise up, Belshazzar, and kiss the

great hand of thy god. Rise up and command more wine. Rise up and call for music and dancing. For that must be the mighty arm of thy god denouncing destruction to Cyrus, and sealing down thy victory to thee. What a cold welcome to give to thy god! O unbelieving and unthankful king Belshazzar! But Belshazzar knew better. Belshazzar's conscience had already interpreted the words before they were all written. You can all sympathise with Beshazzar's state of mind as that hand went on with its awful writing over against the candlestick. You have all come through the same thing yourselves. When something shot in upon you without warning. Something when you were at your ungodly feast with your ungodly companions, or when you had just said, Surely the darkness shall cover me. Something sudden and unaccountable. When your heart suddenly stood still, and did not beat again for a moment. When you were in some sudden accident so that your hair has been white ever since. THAT IS GOD! your conscience whispered to you. That is God come in anger at last. No wonder your knees shook. No wonder you were as cold as a corpse. If a hand came out on the plaster of the wall opposite the pulpit lamp at this moment you would all swoon in your seats. You would know that that hand had come to write your sentence on that wall. Sitting there in your own soft seats you would all, in a moment, be Belshazzar over again.

Belshazzar was as good as dead and at the judgment-seat already. And this was the sentence

of the last day upon Belshazzar: 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.' What balances! What tremendous balances! Balances with all Belshazzar's power, and riches, and opportunities, and responsibilities in the one scale, and then Belshazzar himself, naked and open, in the other scale. Belshazzar was weighed that night with weights of the most absolute truth and justice. Belshazzar was not weighed with King Saul's weights, nor with King David's weights, nor with King Solomon's. Belshazzar was weighed with weights of his own, that no man, before nor since, has ever been weighed with but Belshazzar himself. And you will be weighed, you are being weighed at this moment, with your own proper weights also. God Almighty has a special pair of balances beside Him, waiting and filling up till your life also is numbered and finished. Look up, sinner, at the awful instrument. Forecast the awful scene. All that God has done for you in your birth, in your godly upbringing, in your means of grace, in providences, in all privileges, in divine calls to a better life; all such warnings and all such instructions are collecting into one scale, and your soul—your naked and shivering soul—into the other scale with the whole universe looking on. Well may your knees knock! Well may your thoughts trouble you! How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

'The Lord is a God of knowledge,' says a solemn Scripture, 'and by Him actions are weighed.' That is to say, you will be weighed in those scales of God

by means of which He gets at the very heart's blood of all your actions. Till He has got at the very heart's blood, till He has got at the thoughts and intents of an action, at its most secret motive, He is not yet a God of knowledge. But after that He is. You deceive us, you and your actions both pass with us for what at your heart you are not. But God is not mocked. He knows your exact weight and worth; and the exact weight and worth of all your words and all your deeds. He knows down to the bottom why you did this; and down to the bottom why you did not do that. He has known it all the time, only He has numbered your kingdom, and He lets you go on, deceiving and being deceived, till the Persian is at your gate.

For I am 'ware it is the seed of act
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence in the world below—
Leafage and branchage vulgar eyes admire.

O my soul, what a day that will be for thee when the God of truth, and not any more of lies, brings forth His great balances! His balances, so awful in their burning truth and holiness! What a reversal of reputations! What a stain and overthrow of great names! What a dreadful trumpet-blowing upon the house-tops! What nakedness! What shame! What everlasting contempt! Rocks, fall on us and hide us. O ministers! O people! But O ministers, above all, on that day! your people will gnash their teeth at you on that

day unless you preach to them now the terrible balances of that day. Be sure you preach for one whole sermon every Sabbath the terrors of the Lord. To have even one of your people saved as by fire on that terrible day will be your salvation. For your God is a God of knowledge, and by Him every minister's motives and aims and ends will be weighed before the whole assembled world that day. Rock of Ages, cleft for me!

As you go about in this city you will see great scales sometimes at the street corner, sometimes in a shop for loungers, sometimes at a railway station, strong scales, in which, for a penny, you will see people amusing themselves by weighing themselves and one another, some for pure sport and just to kill time, and some in fear and anxiety lest they should turn out lighter and less in health than they were yesterday. Seek out the places where the scales of the soul are kept open, and seat thy soul in them every day. And, especially, never pass a Sabbath day without comparing your light soul with last Sabbath. God hangs out His scales in the heavens every Sabbath morning. And, above all, He weighs ministers, and their pulpits, and their people on that day. Choose your church, then, above all your choices, choose well your church. The city is before you. Choose a church with God's scales in it at any price. Call a minister who, when he is a probationer, and preaches two trial sermons, at one of the diets hangs God's great balances out of his pulpit and over your pew. And

if there is no such probationer in all the poor leet, and no such preacher in all the besotted parish, then, all the more, and better for you, learn how to weigh yourself without a minister. Weigh and weigh, and weigh yourself till, in all you think, and all you say, and all you do, you find yourself wanting. Be sure there is something wrong with the balances; all the weights are not in, or there is some hidden rust in the hinges, or you have not read the index right, or something, if you do not find yourself wanting. If you are satisfied with yourself any one day, be sure there is a fatal mistake somewhere. Be sure that a dreadful awakening awaits you if you think that all things are fairly well with you. Never go up into your bed till you have been back in the balance; you and your past day. Never sleep till you know how you weigh, well or ill to-night. Weigh, and weigh, and weigh yourself every day, every night,—till there is no more left for the last day to do. Weigh yourself till you have relieved that terrible day of some of its pressure of business on God's hand. He will be pleased, amid much displeasure, on that day, to be lightened of His strange work even in one sinner. When the book comes to your name, He will say: 'Pass by that man, I know all about him; he is weighed and settled up with Me already.' It will be in that case as the Catechism, which is in your other scale, has it; you will be 'openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment.' Weigh yourself, and find yourself ever more and more wanting,

till, in pure pity, God will put away His balance behind His back, and will bring forward His touchstone. I got that out of Thomas Goodwin's fine book, *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*. 'For God brings not a pair of scales to weigh your graces with, and if they be too light refuseth them. No: but He brings a touchstone to try your graces. And, if they be true gold, though never so little of it, that gold will pass current with Him. Though it be but smoke, and not yet flame; though it be but as a wick in the socket, Matt. xii. 20 (as it is there in the original), likelier to die and to go out than to continue, and which we use to throw away; yet He will not quench it, but will accept it. These things you are to recall and to consider in times of distress.' That is to say, as often as you every day and every hour weigh yourselves, and find yourselves wanting, after the balance make use of the touchstone. And then, as King Brennus, in the old history book, cast his heavy sword into the too-light scale when the gold was being weighed; so will Christ cast in His cross into your too-light scale where His gold is being weighed on that day in you.

LXVI

ESTHER

HE Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther was the same sovereign as the Xerxes of Herodotus and Plutarch and Thirlwall and Grote. The Ahasuerus of Holy Scripture was the Xerxes who, after he had subdued Egypt, set out to invade Greece with an army and a navy of absolutely fabulous size and strength. He was the madman who beheaded his chief military engineers, and bastinadoed the Hellespont, and laid fetters of iron upon its waves, because a terrible storm had risen on its waters and had destroyed his great bridge of pontoon boats. He was that incubus of carnage who seated himself on a throne of gold on a hill-top of Greece to see his vast fleet of ships sweep off the sea the sea-forces of Athens.

A king sat on a rocky brow,
Which looks o'er sea-born Salamis :
And ships by thousands lay below,
And men in nations all were his.
He counted them at break of day,
But when the sun set, where were they ?

‘That Ahasuerus,’ says an old Hebrew treatise

called the Second Targum on Esther, 'whose counsels were perverse, and whose orders were not right: who commanded Queen Vashti to appear unveiled before him, but she would not appear. That Ahasuerus in whose time the house of Israel was sold for nought, and in whose time Israel's face became black like the side of a pot. That Ahasuerus in whose days was fulfilled the threatening that in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were evening! and in the evening, Would God it were morning!'

The sacred writer makes us respect Queen Vashti amid all her disgusting surroundings. Whether or no the drunken despot actually sent to her the whole cruel order that the Targumist reports, the sacred writer does not in as many words say. But, whatever the royal order that came to her out of the banqueting-hall exactly was, the brave queen refused to obey it. Her beauty was her own and her husband's: it was not for open show among hundreds of half-drunk men. And in the long-run, the result of that night's evil work was that Vashti was dismissed into disgrace and banishment, and Esther, the Hebrew orphan, was promoted into her place. The whole story of Vashti's fall and Esther's rise would take us into too many miry places for us to-night to wade through. I shall leave this part of the unsavoury story veiled up in all the restrained and dignified language of the sacred writer. Only, let us take heed to note that the sacred writer's whole point is this, that the Divine Hand was, all the time, over-

ruling Ahasuerus's brutality, and Vashti's brave womanliness, and Esther's beauty, and her elevation into Vashti's vacant seat, all this, and more than all this, to work together for the deliverance and the well-being of the remnant of Israel that still lay dispersed in the vast empire of Persia.

Mordecai was the uncle and the foster-father of the orphaned Esther. He had brought Esther up, and his one love in his whole life, after his love for Israel and for the God of Israel, was his love for his little adopted daughter. You may be sure that the devout old man had many thoughts in his heart that he could not get to the bottom of, as he stood by and watched his sister's child lifted up in a moment from her exile and poverty, and actually made the queen of the greatest empire then standing on the face of the earth; and, what was to him still more full of faith, and hope, and love, the favourite queen of the absolute earthly master of all Mordecai's brethren of the house of Israel both at home in Jerusalem, and still scattered abroad over the whole of the Persian empire. I leave you to imagine what were the prayers and psalms that Mordecai offered up with his window open towards Jerusalem, as he saw all Esther's election, and promotion, and coronation, and all her splendour and all her power. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

You would need to transport yourselves away east to the Constantinople of our day at all to understand Haman, and all his diabolical plots

against Esther, and against Mordecai, and against all the people of Israel. Diabolically wicked as our own hearts often are with jealousy and with revenge, at the same time, our hearts are so held down and covered over by religion and civilisation that we do not know ourselves. There is no difference, says Paul. All vices are in us all, says Seneca; only, all vices are not equally extant in us all. But you will see all but all the vices extant in Haman, the favourite, for the time, of Ahasuerus. How Haman rose, and how he fell: how his seat was set above all the other princes of the empire at the beginning, and how his face was covered at the end; how he and Ahasuerus arranged it between themselves that Israel should be exterminated on a set day by a universal slaughter: how Haman had a gallows of fifty cubits high built for Mordecai yesterday, only to be hanged himself on that same gallows to-day: how Israel was sold to Haman by the seal of Ahasuerus, and was delivered by the perilous but successful interposition of Esther, all that is told as only a sacred writer could tell it. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it. And he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon his own head.

Such, then, was Esther's circle, so to call it. But what, exactly, was her opportunity? What was Esther's great opportunity that put her watchful uncle Mordecai into such sleepless anxiety lest she should either miss it, or betray it? Esther's splendid opportunity rose out of that extraordinary combination and concentration of circumstances in

the very heart of which she had been so providentially placed. Haman, as we have seen, was the very devil himself. Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, was seven devils rolled into one. He was a very devil of pride, and of jealousy, and of revenge, and of an insatiable thirst for Hebrew blood. How almighty God should have let so many devils loose in one devil-possessed man is another mystery of His power, and wisdom, and judgment, and love. But there it is, as plain as inspired words can write it. Only, when the end comes, we see that all the time the God of righteousness had His rope round Haman's neck. And when Haman got to the end of his rope, God said over Haman also: Hitherto thou shalt go in thy diabolical wickedness, but no farther. And, then, as another stepping-stone up to Esther's incomparable opportunity, Ahasuerus, Haman's master, was a fit master, as we have seen, for such a servant of Satan as Haman was. Till, between them, the children of Israel of that day were on the very point of being exterminated all over the land by a universal and prearranged assassination. But, as God's providence would have it, step after step, Esther was on the throne, and was in all the fulness of her first influence with Ahasuerus just at that critical moment for the Church of God in the empire of Persia. The great war with Greece; the great national feast consequent on that great war; the absolute intoxication of the king's mind with pride, and with ambition, and with wine; the brutal summons to Vashti; her brave refusal of her

master's brutal demand ; her fall and her banishment ; the election and elevation of Esther, and her immense influence with the despot ; all these things were so many stepping-stones on which Esther had so providentially risen to her splendid opportunity. And, then, to complete and finish it all, there was added to it all, Mordecai's so watchful solicitude over the wickedness of Haman, and over the caprice of Ahasuerus, and over the safety of Israel, and over the miraculous opportunity of Esther. What a long, and complex, and shining chain, link after link, till Mordecai fashioned its last link and bound it with his strong but tender hands upon both the imagination, and the conscience, and the heart of Esther in these noble words: 'Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place ; but both thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed ; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' Then Esther bade them return to Mordecai this answer: 'I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish.' But she did not perish. For she obtained favour in the sight of the king ; and the king held out to her the golden sceptre that was in his hand, and said to her, 'What wilt thou, Queen Esther? And what is thy request? For it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom.' And the end was that Haman and all his murderous plots fell, and Mor-

decai was promoted to sit in Haman's seat, and Israel was saved. And all because, under God, Esther had her opportunity pointed out to her till she saw it and seized it.

The Book of Esther is surely a very clear prophecy and a very impressive parable of the plots, and the persecutions, and the politics of our own day. Armenia under the Sultan is Israel over again under Haman and Ahasuerus. Western Christendom, and England especially, is Esther with her opportunity and her responsibility over again, and the voice of warning by whomsoever spoken is the summons of Mordecai to Esther over again. It is three hundred years of God's long-suffering since Bacon wrote his *Holy War*. 'There cannot but ensue a dissolution of the State of the Turk,' said Bacon, 'whereof the time seemeth to approach. The events of the times do seem to invite Christian kings to a war in respect of the great corruption and relaxation of discipline in the empire of the enemy of Christendom.' So wrote Bacon in 1622. But our Christian kings, if not our Christian people, are still, at the end of the nineteenth century, keeping Haman in his seat, and holding up his hands. In a very fine sermon on my present text, Mr. Spurgeon, in the very spirit and power of Mordecai, has warned England that the God of all the earth has raised her up to her supreme position among the nations of the earth, not for her own aggrandisement, and power, and glory—but for the glory of God, and for the good of mankind. And, that there is no respect or immunity of nations, any more than of men,

with the Judge of all the earth. And that if England, for fear, or for favour, or for ease, or for herself only, flinches and fails God and man in the hour of her opportunity, deliverance will come somehow to the cause of God and man; and,—one holds back his tongue from saying it, and his pen from writing it—‘Thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed.’ As I read Captain Mahan’s masterly and noble *Life of Nelson* the other day with Esther in my mind, I could not but mark such things as these in that great sea-captain who had such a hand in setting England up on her high opportunity. ‘Opportunity,’ says the excellent biographer, ‘fitted by, but Nelson was always ready and grasped it.’ Again, and again, and again the same thing is said of Nelson. Till it shines out above all his other great gifts, and becomes the best description of his great genius. Opportunity, opportunity, opportunity! And, again, ‘duty, not ease; honour, not gain; the ideal, not the material—such, not indeed without frailty and blemish, were ever Nelson’s motives.’ This new *Nelson* is a noble book for sailors and for all men to read. It is a noble book to be written and read at any time, but especially at this present time of gain with dishonour, and of ease at the sacrifice of duty.

But we are not great queens like Esther, with the deliverance of Israel in our hands; nor are we great sea-captains like Lord Nelson, with the making of modern England in our hands. No. But we are what we are; and what God has made

us to be and to do. We all have our own circle set round us of God, and out of our own circle our own opportunities continually arise. Our opportunities may not be so far-reaching or so high-sounding as some other men's are; but they are our opportunities, and they are far-reaching enough for us. Our opportunities are life or death to us and to others; they are salvation or condemnation to our immortal souls; and is that not circle and opportunity enough? We are all tempted every day to say: If I only were Esther! If I only had a great opportunity, would I not rise to it! Would I not speak out at any risk! Would I not do a work, and win a name, and deliver Israel, and glorify God! Did you ever read of Clemens, and Fervidus, and Eugenia, and their imaginary piety? Clemens had his head full of all manner of hypothetical liberalities. He kept proposing to himself continually what he would do if he only had a great estate. Come to thy senses, Clemens. Do not talk what thou wouldst be sure to do if thou wast an angel, but think what thou canst do as a man. Remember what the poor widow did with her two mites, and go and do likewise. Fervidus, again, is only sorry he is not a minister. What a reformation he would have worked in his own life by this time, and in his whole parish, if only God had made him a minister! He would have saved his own soul, and the souls of his people, in season and out of season. Do not believe yourself, Fervidus. You are deceiving yourself. You hire a cabman to drive you to church, and he sits in the

wet street waiting for you, and you never ask him how he manages to live with no Sabbath. It is not asked of you, Fervidus, to live and die a martyr; but just to visit your cabman's wife and children, and have family worship with them on a Sabbath night as you would have done if you had been a minister. Eugenia, again, is a young lady full of the most devout dispositions. If she ever has a family she will let you see family religion. She is more scandalised than she can tell you at the way that some of her school-fellows have married heathens, and at the life they lead without God's worship in their newly-married houses. But, Eugenia, you may never be married so as to show married people how to live. At the same time, you have a maid already, all to yourself. She dresses you for church, and then you leave her to have as little religion as a Hottentot. You turn her away when she displeases you, and you hire another, and so on, till you will die unmarried, and without a godly household, and your circle will be dissolved and your opportunity for ever lost. Your maid, and her sister, and her widowed mother, and her ill-doing brother, and her lover, all are your circle at present, and your opportunity is fast flitting by; and, because it is so near you every day, you do not discover it. Oh, Eugenia, full to the eyes of so many vain imaginations!

You never heard of Eugenia, and Fervidus, and Clemens before, and do not know where to find them. But, no matter. You and I are Fervidus and Eugenia ourselves. You and I are Mordecai and

Esther ourselves. We are in that circle, and we are amid those opportunities, the very best that all the power, and all the wisdom, and all the love of God can provide for us. If it had been better for you and me that we had been born in Jerusalem, and had been exiles in Shushan, and subjects of King Ahasuerus, instead of the free-men of Queen Victoria, Almighty God could as easily have ordered it so when He was ordering all such matters. But, according to His best judgment, you are in the very best place for you in all the world. He could as easily have made you rich as poor. He could have made you successful in life, and married, and at the head of a house of your own, as easily as He has made you what you are. He could have made you a captain as easily as a common sailor. A queen, also, is as easy to God as a kitchen-maid. But we are all talented of God, each according to our several ability. And the servant-maid has as good an opportunity, in the long-run, as her mistress. And the cabin-boy as the captain. A cabin-boy saved Nelson's life at Tene-riffe, and thus won the Nile, and Copenhagen, and Trafalgar, for England. And he who with love and prayer and sweet civility keeps a door in God's house, has a far easier and a far safer life of it; he has his salvation at far less risk than he who has to work out his own salvation, and the salvation of so many others, on the slippery floor of a popular pulpit. All God's very best wisdom, and all His very deepest counsel, and all His very greatest love, have all been laid out in collecting

and concentrating our circle round us, and in evoking our opportunities out of our surroundings, and we pay Him back with grumbings, and with neglect, and with the loss of our own souls and the souls of all who have anything to do with us.

Only open your eyes, and you will see all around you your circle set of God, and all dazzling you with its endless and splendid opportunities. Your most commonplace, most monotonous, most uninteresting, and most every-day circle so shines, if you only saw it aright. What a magnificent and unparalleled opportunity—you dare not deny it—is yours, for your self-control, for the reducing of your pride, for the extermination of your temper, for your humility and your patience, for the forgiving of your injuries, and for hiding your hungry, broken, bleeding heart with God ! And what more would you have ? Yours is a circle with opportunities in it that an elect angel might well envy. Look, O my soul ! how many, and what manner of people, are in thy very family and all around thee, and every one in his evil, even more than in his good, a divine stepping-stone laid there of God for thee whereon to climb up to the place that He has prepared for thee in His heavenly kingdom. What an antipathy you feel, and cannot get over, at that pestilential man. What an ever-gnawing envy at that other man. What an everlasting resentment and retaliation at such and such a man. What a genius has that fourth man for finding out for you the most corrupt places in your so corrupt and so deceitful heart. And so on, till there is nobody

on earth, or in hell, like you. What a circle for a soul like your soul to be set in! What a sin-discovering and sin-exasperating circle! What a seven-fold furnace you walk in every day! There is nobody like you. There never was. O, man, what a chance you have! They know nothing about it sitting there in their soft seats. But what is the chaff to the wheat, if only you will let God cleanse you? These are they—the elders in heaven look down and say over you—who come up hither out of great tribulation! The chaff think that I am describing a monstrosity and an impossibility in my poor description of you. Never mind them. They and their thoughts are nothing to you. You know that the half of your temptations, and exasperations, and mortifications, and humiliations, and harassments of God, and men, and devils, has not been told. There is no tongue to tell it in, and no ear on earth to hear it with. Never mind them. All the deeper, then, is God's so deep plot for thee. All the more secret and unfathomable are His judgments for thee. All the richer set about thee is thy circle. All the more a miracle of grace are thy endless opportunities. All the more incomparable will be thy salvation, and all the more lustrous and weighty thy crown. Let neither man nor devil take it. Have it on thy head, all shining with pearls out of thy seas of sorrow, to cast at thy Saviour's feet on that day.

There is just one circle in the whole universe better than yours for a sinful man's most superb sanctification and salvation, and that is the pulpit,

and the pastorate round about the pulpit. I do not wonder that Fervidus never forgave his father for not having made him a minister. For the divine subtlety has surpassed itself in the circle and in the opportunity it has set round every pulpit. O, all you who are our very best young men, all you, our ablest, foremost at college, most gifted, most many-sided, most original, most speculative, most intellectually pioneering and enterprising young men, I beseech you with all my might, do not miss the magnificent opportunity that the pulpit offers to him who can fill it as you could. Even we who will never now fill it—unless it is with tears and prayers night and day—we see, when it is too late, the incomparable life it at one time held out to us, and now holds out to you. There is no circle anywhere under heaven for individual interest; for all kinds of influence, the most immediate and the most lasting; and for the ever-deepening discipline of your own mind, and heart, and life, like the evangelical pulpit. O young men of Scotland, our choicest and our best young men, why stand ye so long hesitating? Open your eyes. Look around. Look within. Look at the church. Look at the world. Look forward to death and to the last day. And then look at the everlasting reward. They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Then Esther bade them return to Mordecai this answer: Fast ye, and pray for me, and so will I go in unto the king.

LXVII

E Z R A



EZRA was a great student, he was a great statesman, he was a great reformer, and he was a great preacher. Ezra was born in Babylon. Ezra was a child of the Captivity. But all that only made his heart break all the more for the longing he had to see the land of his fathers, and to do what in him lay fully to turn back again the captivity of Judah and completely to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. Ezra was as near as possible Daniel over again, only in other circumstances. For Ezra also was a youth in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science. But Ezra was all the time essentially himself. He was the slavish copy of no man over again—no, not even of Daniel. Ezra was what no man had ever been before him. He was the first scribe in Israel, whatever that was, and he was the first Scriptural preacher, as we say, and his original principle in preaching lasts on to this day, as it will last on and will grow in power and in fruitfulness till the last

day. Ezra was full of originality and of distinction of mind, and his originality and his distinction of mind had their roots deep down in a heart and in a character of the very foremost and the very rarest order. For he was 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. Because Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel the divine statutes and the divine judgments'—a noble introduction, truly, to a noble life.

We are not told why it was that Ezra had not gone up out of Babylon along with the first body of returning exiles. 'The chaff came out of Babylon, but the wheat remained behind,' is a pungent saying of the Jews to this day about the first return of their forefathers from the Babylonian captivity. But, just as our own forefathers had a reformation in Scotland, and then a second reformation, so there was a return and a second return of the children of Judah from their captivity in Babylon. For when the new Jerusalem was in the very greatest straits from her enemies round about, and still more from the slackened faith and the corrupt life of her first return, Ezra rose up and came from Babylon, and was the salvation of Jerusalem. Happily for us, Ezra has embodied in his autobiography the remarkable letter that King Artaxerxes gave to him, and by which the Chaldean scribe was made nothing less than the king's viceroy in Jerusalem. Here are some sentences out of that royal edict: 'Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect

peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of the priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers that are beyond the river, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the law of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.' And so on. A remarkable glimpse into the mind and heart of Artaxerxes, and a remarkable tribute, from a remarkable quarter, to the ability, and to the worth, and to the immense influence of Ezra.

Before Ezra had time to rest himself from the fatigue of his long journey, he was plunged into a perfect sea of trouble in Jerusalem. Ever since the death of the two great leaders of the first return, the social and the religious life of the new Jerusalem had been fast going down to moral corruption and death. And had Ezra not come to her deliverance, Jerusalem would soon have become again what she had so often been before—as Sodom, and like unto Gomorrah. The complete and even scrupulous separation of Israel from the absolute brutishness of the nations round about her,—this was the first law of Israel's life as a nation and as a church. There was no reason why Jehovah, at such a cost,

so to speak, should continue to preserve Israel alive on the earth, unless she was to be a people pure and holy, and separated to the Lord, till the time should come when she would be able to be the salt of the whole earth and the light of the whole world. How Jerusalem could have fallen so suddenly and so low the history does not tell us; it leaves us to read all that in our own hearts. But, to his absolute consternation, Ezra found that already every wall of separation had been broken down between Israel and the Canaanites round about, till both the domestic life and the public life of Jerusalem was in nothing but in name to be distinguished from the abominations of the nations that their fathers had been brought out of Egypt to avenge and to root out. It was only then that Ezra saw how good the providence of God had been to him in having provided him with an instrument of such absolute authority as the king's letter was. For it needed all the authority of this autograph letter, and all the courage and resolution of Ezra to boot, in order to deal with the terrible disorders that everywhere faced him as he went about in Jerusalem. Those who are well enough read to remember how John Calvin ruled Geneva, and how John Knox and his colleagues did their best to rule Edinburgh—they will best understand and appreciate the rule of Ezra in Jerusalem. So far as those great men could do it, Jerusalem and Geneva and Edinburgh were for the time true theocracies: cities of God, that is; governed as Artaxerxes decreed that Jerusalem should be governed, by the law of the God of

heaven. Not perfectly ; not without many mistakes and infirmities of temper, and even crimes. But withal, both Ezra and Calvin and Knox made most able and most fearless efforts to set up the Kingdom of God in those three famous cities. So like, indeed, were those three statesmen and churchmen to one another that the modern historians of Israel are fain to come to Edinburgh for their best parallels and illustrations when they are engaged in writing about the Jerusalem of Ezra's day. Our Reformation, our Congregation, our First and Second Books of Discipline, our Solemn League and Covenant, and our Edinburgh pulpit—without those illustrations, taken from our own city, some of the most brilliant pages of Ewald, and Milman, and Stanley, and Plumptre, and our own Robertson Smith, would never have been written.

Ezra, while yet a young man in Babylon, had become 'a ready scribe in the law of Moses ; in that law which the Lord God of Israel had given.' In the words of the 45th Psalm, Ezra's was already the 'pen of a ready writer.' By his high birth Ezra was by office a priest ; when he cared to do it he could trace his unbroken and unblemished descent back to Aaron himself. But what of that, when there was neither temple, nor altar, nor mercy-seat, nor anything else of all the temple apparatus in Babylon ? And had Ezra not discovered other and better work for himself : had Ezra not adapted himself to his new circumstances, and fitted himself into his new world, his would have been an idle and a lost and an embittered life in Babylon. But

Ezra had the humility and the insight, the genius and the grace, to see that the future seat of spiritual worship, and the true source of spiritual life on earth was not to be a building any more, but a book. Ages and ages before books became what they now are, Ezra was a believer in books, and in the Book of books. You who make a truly evangelical use of your Bible, and thus have a truly evangelical and a truly intelligent love for your Bible, must not forget what you owe to Ezra; for it was in Babylon, and it was under Ezra's so scholarly and so spiritual hands, that your Bible first began to take on its shape and solidity. When all the other priests and Levites were moping about, not knowing what to do with themselves because they had no traditional altar at which to minister, Ezra struck out a new kind of priesthood and ministry in Israel which has outlasted all the temples and priesthoods in Israel, and which will last till the end of time. We can easily see what a splendid time the young priest-scribe must have spent in Babylon when we imaginatively construct to ourselves those eloquent and epoch-making words: 'Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it; and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.' Ezra's true successors among ourselves; and, especially, those who, like Ezra, are still in their opportune youth and with their life in Jerusalem all before them—they will not fail to take note that Ezra's studies began and were carried on in his own heart. Having no temple precincts made with hands in which to dwell with God, Ezra dwelt all the more with God

in the New Testament temple of his own heart. All other studies may more or less prosper independently of the state of the student's heart—language, law, medicine, science, philosophy even,—but not divinity. Divinity, and the great Ezraite text-book of divinity, absolutely demand a devout, a humble, a penitent and a clean heart. And Ezra, the father of all our expository and experimental preachers, has this testimony, that he prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it. Ezra was of Luther's mind, so long before Luther's day, that it is the clean heart even more than the clear head that makes the theologian. Let all our intending preachers examine themselves, and so let them enter on their ever venerable, ever fresh, and ever vacant office.

A distinguished critic has claimed for Jonathan Edwards that his favourite and most frequently recurring word is 'sweetness.' At the same time, I see that a truly Catholic and Episcopal Professor holds that the word 'light,' even more than sweetness, is Edwards's characteristic word. Had I been suddenly asked that about Edwards, I would have said 'beauty.' You are safe to take all the three. John's favourite utterance is 'love,' as all the world knows; while Paul's peculiar mark and sure token in every epistle of his is 'grace.' Now, what is Ezra's most frequent and most often-recurring utterance in his autobiography? Well, it is not taxes nor tithes, though he was a great civil and ecclesiastical administrator. It is nothing technical to masons or carpenters, though he has armies of such

workmen engaged in the temple and on the walls of Jerusalem. It is not even the words that we would look for in a ready writer. Ezra's peculiar and characteristic expression is 'The hand of the Lord,' 'The hand of the Lord,' 'The hand of the Lord.' The hand of the Lord is constantly upon Ezra. When anything prospers with Ezra it is again, not Artaxerxes, nor himself, but 'The hand of the Lord.' He introduces himself to his readers as a man in all things under the hand of the Lord. The king granted him all his requests according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. And upon the first day of the first month began he to go up out of Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem according to the good hand of his God upon him. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go with me. And as soon as he secured a suitable colleague to assist him in his immense work, 'by the good hand of God upon us, they brought me a man of understanding.' Just as he had refused an armed convoy with these same words, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek Him. 'And from the river Ahava to Jerusalem the hand of our God was upon us to deliver us out of the hand of the enemy.' Our learned men are able to trace and detect the authorship and the authenticity of anonymous and pseudonymous books and manuscripts by the peculiar words and phrases and constructions that occur in them. I think we might almost let the higher critics assert that if

there is any page of personal narrative, and no acknowledgment of the hand of God in it, whoever may have written that self-sufficient page it cannot have been Ezra.

Have you discovered and appropriated to yourself Ezra's great prayer? Bishop Andrewes discovered and appropriated it bodily. For that, as you know, was Andrewes's famous and fruitful way with himself. Whenever he came in his reading on any prayer, or psalm, or verse, or even a single word that first spoke to his heart from God, and then uttered his heart to God, he straightway took it down till his *Private Devotions* became the extraordinary treasure-house that it is. I do not remember another such intercession and suretyship prayer in all the Bible as Ezra's prayer was in the temple of the new, but already backsliding, Jerusalem. How this true priest makes himself one with the great transgressors for whom he prays! As you listen you would think that Ezra had been a very ringleader in all those utter abominations that he blushes to have to name. Ezra confesses Jerusalem's sin with an agony such as if all that sin had all been his own. Ezra's spirit in public prayer, his attitude, and his utterances are enough to scandalise all hard and dry and meagre-hearted men. But Ezra's prayer, whether in his own book, or borrowed into another book, or assimilated into another praying heart, will always carry captive all tender, and generous, and deep, and holy hearts around it. And thus it was that day that a kindred spirit in that congregation named Shechaniah broke in upon Ezra's

prayer and declared that he and his fellow-elders could stand such praying no longer. If Ezra would only stop they would do anything he was pleased to command them. It is always so. If you would move me with your preaching, or with your praying, or with your singing, first be moved yourself. Only, where have we the chance of such commanding and contagious prayer as that was which made all Jerusalem take such sudden fire that day? There had been a long-laid and a daily-built-up altar-fire in Ezra's own heart ever since that early day in Babylon when he first began to prepare his heart to seek the law of the Lord. A life like Ezra's life, first in Babylon and then in Jerusalem,—that is the real secret of every sudden and all-prevailing outburst of prayer both with God and with man.

But, with all that, such is my immense and ever-growing appreciation of the pulpit that I look on all that—Ezra's birth in Babylon, his suspension from his priesthood, his great and original work upon the law of Moses, his summons to Jerusalem, his hourly and unceasing experience under the hand of the Lord, his extraordinary exercises both in personal and in intercessory prayer,—as but so much providential preparation for Ezra's expository and experimental pulpit. It is a grand picture—who will worthily paint it?—and it is only the first of a multitude of such grand pictures. Ezra, standing in his pulpit of wood, with his thirteen elders standing supporting him, six on his right hand and seven on his left. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, and he and his

colleagues caused the people to understand the law and the people stood in their place. So Ezra read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading. That is delightfully described, is it not? And that is the very first original and most ancient type and pattern of our best pulpit work to this day. And that type and that pattern has been kept up with splendid success down to this day. To name some of the very masters of pulpit exposition—we have Chrysostom, and Augustine, and Calvin, and Matthew Henry, and, the richest of them all to me, that masterly exegete of the Puritan pulpit, an interpreter, one of a thousand, Thomas Goodwin. And, because he is still alive, and not two hundred years dead, is that a right reason why I should not here name Goodwin's direct successor in his incomparable pulpit—Dr. Joseph Parker? An expositor and a commentator quite worthy to be written in that shining roll. If you have not enough brotherly love to believe that, just borrow, if you will not buy, say the tenth volume of the People's Bible, and read what Dr. Parker says about Ezra, and then be honest enough to agree with me and to thank me. All those men laid out their pulpit life on Ezra's exact plan. That is to say, not so much preaching trite and hackneyed sermons, on trite and hackneyed texts; but reading in the law of God consecutively, giving the sense, and causing the people to understand the reading. That exactly describes our own Scottish habit of 'lecturing,' as we call it. And it was to that pulpit practice, in

no small degree, that our forefathers owed it that they came to know their Bible so well, till they were, and are, so ill to please with the pulpit work of their preachers. It is a noble tradition and a perfect method ; only, to do it well demands very hard labour, and very wide reading, and very deep thinking, as well as an early and a life-long preparation of the preacher's heart. But he who sets to himself this noblest of all possible tasks, and perseveres to the end in it, ever learning in it, ever improving in it, ever adding to his treasures of exposition and illustration, ever putting himself into his lecture, and ever keeping himself out of it, he will never grow old, he will never become worked out, he will never weary out his people, but he will to old age bring forth his fruit in his season, and his leaf will not wither. And, then, both to him and to his happy people, will be fulfilled every new Sabbath morning some of the most blessed promises in all the Word of God. 'For I will bring you to Zion, saith the Lord, and I will give you pastors after mine own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'

LXVIII

SANBALLAT

YOU must clearly understand, to begin with, that Samaria was already, even in that early day, the deadly enemy of Jerusalem, and also that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. And Sanballat was a man of this kind, that he was not content with doing his very best to make Samaria both prosperous and powerful, but he must also do his very best to keep Jerusalem downtrodden and destroyed. And thus it was that, when Sanballat heard that Nehemiah had come from Shushan with a commission from Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the exasperating news drove Sanballat absolutely beside himself. And thus it is that such a large part of Nehemiah's autobiography is taken up with Sanballat's diabolical plots and conspiracies both to murder Nehemiah and to destroy the new Jerusalem.

The Book of Nehemiah, you must know, is the last written of all the historical books of the Old Testament. We have nothing in our Bible between Nehemiah and Matthew. Nehemiah, among the

historical books of the Old Testament, is just what Malachi is among the prophetic books. Nehemiah is not much read, but his book is full of information and instruction and impression of the most interesting and fruitful kind. And as we work our way through Nehemiah's memoirs of himself, we see in Sanballat an outstanding instance of the sleepless malice and the diabolical wickedness of all unprincipled party spirit and besotted partisanship.

Now, in the first place, diabolically wicked as party spirit too often becomes, this must be clearly understood about party spirit, that, after all, it is but the excess, and the perversion, and the depravity of an originally natural, and a perfectly proper principle in our hearts. It was of God, and it was of human nature as God had made it, that Sanballat should love and serve Samaria best, and that Nehemiah should love and serve Jerusalem best. And all party spirit among ourselves also, at its beginning, is but our natural and dutiful love for our own land, and for our own city, and for our own Church, and for those who think with us, and work with us, and love us. And as long as this world lasts, and as long as human nature remains what it is, there will always be predilections, and preferences, and parties both in the family, and in the city, and in the State, and in the very Church of Christ itself. As long as there is such a rich variety and diversity of talents, and capacities, and dispositions, and tastes, and interests among men, there will always be bodies of men thinking together, and working together, and living together, and

loving one another, more than they can live with, and work with, and love other men who see their duties and pursue their interests in another light. Now, this natural principle of mutual attraction is not planted in human nature for no reason. But all the discoverable final causes of this principle are too many for me to enter on now; to enter on them at all would lead me far away from far more important and urgent work to-night. Suffice it to say then, that party spirit, at its very worst, is but another case and illustration of the corruption and the depravity of the very best.

But, then, when it comes to its worst, as it too often does come, party spirit is the complete destruction both of truth and of love. The truth is hateful to the out-and-out and thoroughgoing partisan. We all know that in ourselves. When we have, at any time, become abandoned partisans in anything, then, farewell the truth. We will not have it. As many lies as you like, but not the truth. We hate and detest both you and your truth. It exasperates us to hear it. You are henceforth our enemy if you will insist on speaking it. We cast it, and all its organs, out of our doors. We shut our eyes to the truth, and we stop our ears. It is not truth that divides us up into such opposed parties as we see all around us in Church and State; it is far more lies. It is not principle once in ten times. Nine times out of ten it is pure party spirit. And I cling to that bad spirit, and to all its works, as if it were my life. I feel unhappy when you tell me the truth, if it is good

truth, about my rival. I feel the sore pain of concession. I feel as if all my foundations were being taken away from under me. How fierce you always make me when you so rejoice in the truth and go about spreading it! I am a Jew, and I want no dealings with the Samaritans. All I want is to hear that fire has fallen from heaven to consume them. I am a Protestant, and a Presbyterian, and a Free Churchman, and I want to stand aloof all my life from all who differ from me. I do not want to hear what they have to say for their fathers and for themselves. I hate like poison all your proposed fraternisings and unions. I hope that the old walls of separation will hold together all my time.

And where truth is hated in that way love can have no possible home. Truth is love in the mind, just as love is truth in the heart. Trample on the one, and you crush the other to death. Cherish and be tender with the one, and you will eat the fruits and drink the sweets of the other. Now the full-blown party spirit is utter poison to the spirit of love as well as to the spirit of truth. 'Love suffereth long, and is kind: love rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things.' But party spirit is the clean contradiction of all that. 'No assurances,' says Thucydides, 'no pledges of either party could gain credit with the other. The most reasonable proposals, coming from an opponent, were received not with candour, but with suspicion. No artifice was reckoned dishonourable

by which a point could be carried. Every recommendation of moderate measures was reckoned either a mark of cowardice, or of insincerity. He only was considered a completely safe man whose violence was blind and boundless; and those who endeavoured to steer a middle course were spared by neither side.' That might have been written yesterday, so true to our own public life also is every syllable of it. Archbishop Whately's Bampton Lecture, for the year 1822, has for its subject, 'The Use and the Abuse of Party Spirit in matters of Religion,' and a very able piece of work it is. Whately was one of the ablest men in a very able day in the Church of England. His strong Saxon sense, supported by wide reading, and by clear and disciplined habits of thought, rose almost to the level of genius. Could Whately and Newman have been mixed together we should have had a perfect English theologian. Whately's third lecture is entitled 'A Carnal Mind the Cause of Divisions,' and at the foot of a page in which he shows 'how self-interest may chance to be the first mover of discord,' this footnote stands, which I repeat to you with both pain, and shame, and indignation: 'It happens but too often, it is to be feared,' so the note runs, 'that a dissenting chapel is regarded as a profitable speculation by persons of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, looking upon religion as a gainful occupation.' Why, I wonder, should it be so much feared that a dissenting chapel is a profitable speculation to persons of corrupt minds, more than a cathedral stall or an Episcopal palace?

What an indecent blot is that on such an able book! And what an illustration it supplies of that very vice the Archbishop is so ably exposing—the blinding and perverting influences of party positions and of a party spirit! Those five lines of prejudice and partisanship made far more impression on me than all the rest of the Archbishop's so masterly and so impressive volume. With my own ears I once heard the late Canon Liddon, when preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral, class Oliver Cromwell with Alexander the Sixth and Richard the Third! To such lengths will a malevolent party spirit go even in the Christian pulpit!

By the just and righteous ordination of Almighty God all our sins carry their own punishment immediately and inseparably with them. And party spirit, being such a wicked spirit, infallibly inflicts a very swift and a very severe punishment on the man who entertains it. You know yourselves how party spirit hardens your heart, and narrows and imprisons and impoverishes your mind. You must all know how party spirit poisons your feelings, and fills you with antipathy to men you never saw, as well as to men all around you who have never hurt a hair of your head, and would not if they could. We read in the *Apologia* how Newman's imagination was stained by his prejudices and his passions. And every man who labours to keep his imagination and his heart open and clean and unstained, will have to confess what a tremendous task he has undertaken. You must either be a great saint, or a great fool, if your imagination and your heart are

not stained to absolute wickedness against men, and against churches, and against this and that party in the Church and in the State. It humiliates my head to the dust of death, and it breaks my heart before God and before myself every day I live, to discover such stains in my heart against men who have hurt me in nothing but in this—that they have given their great talents and their shining services to another church than my church, and to another party than my party. I cannot meet such men on the streets but they scowl at me, and I at them back again. Or if we must stop and speak for a moment, we put on Sanballat's face to one another, and take hold of Sanballat's hand, while all the time our hearts are as full as they can hold of Sanballat's mischief that he thought to do to Nehemiah. What a terrible punishment all that is, let him tell us who, before God, is keeping his heart clean of all that. Unless it is casting pearls before swine to attempt to tell such things to us. No! Do not attempt to tell such things to us lest we turn again and rend you.

Another divine punishment of party spirit is seen in the way that it provokes retaliation, and thus reproduces and perpetuates itself till the iniquity of the fathers is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate the truth and murder love. Sanballat hated Nehemiah and plotted against him; and Nehemiah, not yet being Jesus Christ, nor one of His disciples, retaliated on Sanballat and on Samaria in a way that sadly stains the otherwise spotless pages of

his noble book. And between them, Sanballat and Nehemiah kindled that intense and unnatural hatred that is still burning in every heart in Jerusalem and Samaria, when the woman at the well refuses a cup of cold water to our Lord, and when the Samaritans will not make ready for Him nor receive Him, because His face is as though He would go to Jerusalem; and till He pays the woman back with a well of water springing up to everlasting life, and the men of Samaria with the parable of the Good Samaritan. As you know, it takes two to make a complete and a lasting quarrel; so it takes many more than two to make party spirit perfect. And if Nehemiah, and the other builders of Jerusalem, had but had our New Testament truth and love, long centuries of ill-will, and insult, and injury, would have been escaped, and a welcome given to the Lord of truth and love that He did not get. And, inheriting no little good from our contending forefathers, we have inherited too many of their injuries, and retaliations, and antipathies, and alienations also. And the worst of it is, that we look on it as true patriotism, and the perfection of religious principle, to keep up and perpetuate all those ancient misunderstandings, and injuries, and recriminations, and alienations. 'Ye know not what spirit ye are of,' said our Lord to His disciples when they wished Him to consume the Samaritans off the face of the earth, 'for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' To save them, that is, from all their inherited hurts, and hatreds, and

antipathies, and animosities, and suspicions. Who, then, is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envyings and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Who, then, is a wise man, and endued with wisdom among you? Who would fain be such a man? Who would fain at once and for ever extinguish out of his heart this fire from hell? Who would behave to his rivals and enemies, not as Nehemiah, good man though he was, behaved to the Samaritans, but as Jesus Christ behaved to them? Who, in one word, would escape the sin, and the misery, and the long-lasting mischief of party spirit? Butler has an inimitable way of saying some of his very best and very deepest things. Our master-moralist seems to be saying nothing at all, when all the time what he is saying is everything. And here is one of his great sayings that has helped me more in this matter than I can tell you. 'Let us remember,' he says, 'that we differ as much from other men as they differ from us.' What a lamp to our feet is that sentence as we go through this world! As we travel from home and go abroad; as we see other nations with their own habits and their own manners; as we see other churches at their worship; as we read other men's books, and speeches, and newspapers, and

they ours; as we encounter other men's principles, and prejudices, and habits of mind, and life and heart—what a light to our path are Butler's wise words! And till we come, in God's spirit of truth, and humility, and love, to take every other man's place and point of view, till we look at all things, and especially at ourselves, with all other men's eyes, and ears, and hearts. But why multiply many words about this plain matter? It is all contained long ago in the two old Commandments—to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to love God with all our mind, and heart, and strength, and will.

And, then, when at any time, and towards any party, or towards any person whatsoever, you find in yourself that you are growing in love, and in peace, and in patience, and in toleration, and in goodwill, and in good wishes, acknowledge it to yourself; see it, understand it, and confess it. Do not be afraid to admit it, for that is God within your heart. That is the Divine Nature, that is the Holy Ghost. Just go on in that Spirit, and ere ever you are aware you will be caught up and taken home to that Holy Land where there is neither Jerusalem nor Samaria. There will be no party spirit there. There will be no controversy there. There will be no corruption of motive there, and no imputation of it. No ignorance will be found there, and no prejudice, no partiality, no antipathy, no malignity, and no delight in doing mischief. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off.

Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.

LXIX

NEHEMIAH

OR a long time I was not much drawn to Nehemiah. I did not aright understand Nehemiah, and I did not love him. He was not my kind, as we say: the kind, that is, that I like best to read about, and to think about, and to imitate and to preach. I thought him, if a patriotic, at the same time, an outside, a surface, a hard, and an austere man. And, worst of all, a man who was always well pleased with himself; the first of Pharisees, in short, as Ezra was the first of Scribes. I should have remembered what Canon Gore puts so well in *Lux Mundi*: 'At starting, each of us, according to our disposition, is conscious of liking some books of Scripture better than others. This, however, should lead us to recognise that, in some way, we specially need the teaching that is less attractive to us. We should set ourselves to study what we less like, till that, too, has had its proper effect in moulding our conscience and shaping our character.' 'If I met a man from New England,' said Dr. Duncan, 'I would say to him, "Read the

Marrow Men." If I met a Marrow Man, I would say, "Read the New-Englanders."

Like Daniel and his three companions, and like Ezra his own colleague, Nehemiah was a child of the Captivity. They had all been born and brought up in the furnace of affliction. And they were all children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace. Like Ezra also, Nehemiah has written his own biography, and like Ezra also, he both begins and ends his autobiography with great abruptness. We have neither Nehemiah's youth nor his old age in his autobiography. His whole memoir of himself is taken up with his leave of absence from Shushan the palace, and with what he was able to do for Jerusalem during his furlough from Shushan. By the time that Nehemiah's fragment of autobiography opens, the first return from the captivity has for some time taken place. Jerusalem, in a way, has been largely rebuilt. The temple also, after a fashion, has been restored, and the daily services of the temple are in full operation. But the walls and the gates and the towers and the battlements of the new Jerusalem still lie in ruins all round the city; and while that is the case, the whole city stands open to the inroads and the ravages of their enemies round about. Nor is all that the worst. It is a weariness and a despair to read it,—but the returned captives themselves were living in far greater poverty and bondage in Jerusalem than in

all their seventy years in Babylon itself. Those of you who have ever read and at all understood the two sad little books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the still more sad little book of Malachi,—that saddened and despairing reader will have seen in those three books what a hopeless people God had to do with. And, with still more self-disgust and self-despair, he will have seen what an Old Testament type and example the Jews always are of ourselves.

The schoolboys who have read the *Cyropædia* can best picture Nehemiah to themselves when he says that he was the King of Persia's cupbearer. The amusing episode of Cyrus and his grandfather's cupbearer is the best commentary we possess on the position of Nehemiah in Shushan the palace. The Persian cupbearer was far more than a cupbearer. He was a kind of prime minister, and master of the ceremonies, both in one. He was the royal favourite above all the rest of the palace, till his privileges and his powers and his wealth were all a proverb. He was able to keep a table and set up an equipage at his own expense like a prince. Daniel's youthful beauty, his graces of character and manner, his shining talents, and his high state-services may all be borrowed and set down as the opening pages of Nehemiah's memoirs of himself. Where Josephus got it he does not tell us, but he gives us a most picturesque and pathetic account of the way in which the terrible state of Jerusalem came to the cupbearer's ears. Nehemiah was taking the air one evening outside the walls of Persepolis when some travel-stained men passed him on their way into

the gate of the city. As they passed him he overheard them conversing together in the Hebrew tongue. You know how your mother-tongue would go to your heart if you were an exile in a far country, however prosperous outwardly you were. And Nehemiah forgot all about Artaxerxes' supper as he talked with the travellers, till he said to them as he bade them farewell, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy!' Young John Milton, you will remember, could not enjoy the skies, or the art, or the letters of Italy, while England at home was as she was. And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence heretofore. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live for ever! Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said to me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven, says the cupbearer. How he was heard, and how the king's heart was moved, and how Nehemiah got leave of absence to go and build the walls of Jerusalem, and the letters that he carried to the king's

foresters, and to those that kept the royal quarries, and how he set out to the city of his fathers to finish it—all that is to be read in Nehemiah's own memoirs written out for us to this day by his own graphic hand.

If the style is the man in the Scriptures also, then we see Nehemiah to the very life in the whole of his book ; but, especially, in his second and third chapters. We see him as well as if we had carried the candle before him all those three nights in which he went round the ruins of Jerusalem. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me : neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem : neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dungport, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did : neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. A self-contained man. A man of his own counsel. A man with the counsel of God alone in his mind and in his heart. A reserved and a resolute man. A man to take the command of other men. A man who will see things with his own eyes, and that without all eyes seeing

him. A man in no haste or hurry. He will not begin till he has counted the cost. And then he will not stop till he has finished his work. The way that Nehemiah took to build and complete the whole wall round about Jerusalem was this: Every trade, and profession, and corporation, and outstanding city family took a portion, and undertook either to build that portion with their own hands or to see it built. And, to begin with, as was but natural and seemly, Eliashib the high priest began first to build; and, as was to be expected, he held a special sacrifice and spiritual service both at the beginning and at the end of his portion of the wall. A volunteer party from the neighbouring city of Jericho took up the portion of the wall adjoining Eliashib; and next to them a man whose name we do not know. 'I will take the fish gate,' said Hassenaah. 'I and my sons will lay the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.' Then came three men,—but we have never heard their strange names before nor since: their names are only written in heaven, and in the third chapter of Nehemiah. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; 'but their nobles,' Nehemiah takes this note on his tablets, 'put not their necks to the work of the Lord.' 'Let me have the old gate to repair,' said Jehoiada, the son of Paseah. 'My heart warms to the old gate.' And he and Meshullam divided the old gate between them. Then the guild of the goldsmiths did a large piece, and next to them the apothecaries. These last fortified a strong and a broad portion of

the wall, as I have known apothecaries do among ourselves. And, then, after some unknown but noble men: look here at the ruler of the half of Jerusalem and his daughters. I opened Matthew Henry in a hurry here, so sure was I that he would have something specially shrewd on the daughters of Shallum. But even Homer sometimes nods. To my great disappointment I found nothing in the unfailing annotator worth repeating to you. But he wakens up when he comes to the thirtieth verse. Meshullam Matthew Henry holds to have been a lodger who undertook a piece of the wall the size of his own rented room. So that you see our adherents here, and our seat-holders, and those not yet full members, may take their part in all our work till the time comes when they shall have sons and daughters to help them. Thus, at any rate, did Berechiah's lodger, if he was not also his son. That is not the half of Nehemiah's roll of noble names; but you can go round the whole wall for yourselves, and see the rest of the builders at their work for yourselves, till you come to the goldsmith's son at the going up of the corner.

And let it not be overlooked, to their praise, that all the builders builded every man with his sword by his side because of the deadly envy and ill-will of their enemies round about. The enemies of Jerusalem 'took it heinously,' says Josephus, that the wall of Jerusalem was in the way to be rebuilt. They so laboured, Nehemiah proudly writes it about them, from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. And all the time Artaxerxes' cupbearer

had his eye on everything. He was everywhere, and he was the power and the success of everything. The young cupbearer has now become a great statesman and an experienced administrator, till he has left his mark on Jerusalem as long as one stone shall stand upon another. But you must really take time and read the whole of this inimitable little book for yourselves at a downsitting. And that, if only to see how Ezra and Nehemiah worked together, the old scribe and the young cupbearer. How the priests' pulpit of wood was set up, how the support of the altar and the pulpit was seen to, how the public sanctification of the Sabbath was secured, and other reforms instituted with a firmness of hand that there was no resisting. Altogether, this little book is full of Nehemiah's absolute mastery in Jerusalem, and his determination that Jerusalem shall be both a safe, a happy, and a holy city to dwell in. Speaking of the preachers of Jerusalem and their support, just as we get our Presbytery, and our Kirk-Session, and our Expository Pulpit, and our Puritan Sabbath from the new Jerusalem of that day, so we get our Deacons' Court and our Sustentation Fund from Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was an old preacher, full of years, full of learning, and full of an experienced piety, giving himself continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, while young Nehemiah, like Stephen in the Acts, served tables in the new Jerusalem. That is to say, he looked after the walls of Jerusalem, and the whole temple furniture, and the support of the temple ministry.

If our pulpit of wood and its method of work on the Word of God is ancient and honourable, so also is our Deacons' Court. And neither in the new Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day, nor in the same Jerusalem in Peter's day, was the prophetic and apostolic and diaconate compact better observed, on the deacons' side at any rate, than it is in our own congregations at the present moment. And because of all this, says Nehemiah, we make a sure covenant and write it out, and our princes, Levites, and priests all seal unto it, that we will not forsake nor forget the house of our God.

Nehemiah was such a worker in and around the house of God that he would have satisfied James the Just himself. James, the brother of the Lord, was always insisting on work in all the twelve tribes scattered abroad. 'Even faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.' But for his love of work, Nehemiah again and again would have been a dead man. Again and again Sanballat would have had Nehemiah in his clutches, but that Nehemiah would not come down. 'Come out to a conference in the plains of Ono, at any rate,' said Sanballat. 'No,' answered Nehemiah, 'I have no time for conferences. I am doing such a great work on the wall up here that I cannot for one moment leave it.' Yes, it was the cupbearer's quenchless love of work that both saved his life on several occasions, as well as built and finished the wall of Jerusalem. Cupid, in the

old fable, complained bitterly to Jupiter that he could never debauch the Muses, because he never could come on them sitting idle. If work is not worship, then it is surely the next thing to it, so much so that, just bring up your son in idleness, and your grey hairs are as good as in their grave already. Whereas, give your son something to do, from making tables to serving them, and you have as good as saved his soul. He has no time so much as to speak to Sanballat. Let every young man then begin early to do something. Let him be a student and a lover of good books. Let him teach a class. Let him be honoured, and trusted, and elected like Stephen to be a deacon. Let him do his noble duties with the understanding and the heart. Let him know what he is doing every time he does it, and he will thus purchase for himself a good degree; that is to say, good work, and a real love for the good work, and step after step, he will escape all the Sanballats of the city, and will go on from work to work, through a youth and a manhood of interest and usefulness, occupation and protection, to an old age of the best love among us and the highest honours.

And if any young minister should be ordained, like Nehemiah, over such a congregation as Jerusalem was in that day; if he finds the gates thereof burned with fire, and the walls laid waste, and the whole house of God in reproach round about; let him read the Book of Nehemiah till he has it by heart. Let him view the wreck and ruin on his arrival as the young cupbearer did. Let him say

nothing to any man. Only let him rise up in the King's name and build. Let him come to the King's quarries for stone, and to the King's forests for timber. The good hand of his God being upon him. Let him preach his very best to his long-starved people every Sabbath morning; and better and better every year he lives. Let him visit his long-neglected people night and day. Let him be like Samuel Rutherford in as small a church as was in Scotland in that day, and now and for ever as famous. Let him be his people's boast. Let him be always in his study, always at their sickbeds, always preaching, always praying. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard that followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for the washing. And at the dedication of the wall there was great gladness, both with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps. For God had made them to rejoice with great joy; the wives also and the children rejoiced. So that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. And it was Nehemiah's faith in God, his love of Jerusalem, and his hard work for Jerusalem that did it.





